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Negotiating Precarious Lives: Young Women, Work, and ICTs in Neoliberal South Korea

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy awarded by the University of Sussex

1 February 2016

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ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates the link between the precarious lives of underemployed young Korean women in the post IMF crisis and their use of digital media. It draws on precarity and immaterial labour, key concepts in studies on new forms of labour and life in neoliberal, post-industrial society. The thesis contributes to this field of research in two main aspects. Firstly, moving away from an ahistorical, Eurocentric, and androcentric tendency, through ethnographic fieldwork, it reveals the particular gendered nature of precarity historically formed in a particular geographical site, South Korea. Secondly, it links the two concepts, which are closely related theoretically but located in different fields. It demonstrates how precarity is a condition leading to individuals taking up forms of immaterial labour in an attempt to manage their precariousness.

The research underpinning this argument consisted of a year of ethnographic fieldwork in Seoul, investigating young women's life stories, work trajectories and, following media anthropologists, use of digital media as part of their communicative ecology. The thesis shows how fifteen underemployed young women with different education levels and social backgrounds negotiated precarity, producing various ways of living: lives encircled to an extreme level of social withdrawal; lives juggling with various part-time jobs; lives stuck in permanent training; lives protesting on the street. Their respective modes of underemployment meant that they experienced personal isolation, frustration, and fear of people, forming a strong desire to be 'normal' in society. Their digital media use was deeply integral to attempts to become normal in everyday life. In this respect, I argue that precarity is a condition to form a vast amount of 'free labour' workforce for the digital economy.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis is to a great extent a co-production with many women. Most of all, my deepest appreciation goes to the women who were willing to participate in the research, told me their stories, and even encouraged me to keep doing the research, without any reward. I appreciate their hospitality and solidarity. I am particularly indebted to people around Hope Hall for helping me to organise a focus group for the research. The thesis is also a product of the long period of conversations with my supervisors, Caroline Bassett and Janice Winship. Over nine years, their contributions were brilliant and extensive. I owe enormous intellectual debt to them. Given so many breaks and obstacles in my study, this thesis would not have materialized without their persistent guidance and warm encouragement. My old teachers and friends have been greatly supportive to the project and my life, including Donghoo Lee, Jungsook Han, Sonya Shin, Jiwoo Jung, Minje Lee. My special thanks goes to Jasmin Immonen, Rachel Cole, Hazel McLeod, Ana Porroche-Escudero, and Hyunjung Kim for the time that we spent together at Sussex. Their friendship tremendously helped my survival in the UK. I also thank to my mom, brother and two sisters. At last, I would like to express my deepest love, respect and gratitude to my partner Jung-yup Lee and our precious daughter Dayul Lee. Due to their support, love, and sacrifice, I was able to complete this thesis.

CHAPTER 1 THE PRECARIOUS LIVES OF KOREAN YOUNG WOMEN

1 INTRODUCTION

This thesis investigates the precarious lives of contemporary young women in South Korea, focusing on their life/ work trajectories and their immaterial labour/leisure via networked media such as the Internet and mobile phones. I aim to explore how young women have been inventing their ways of life in the aftermath of the social changes since the IMF crisis, which is the crucial point of Korean transition into neoliberal society, and how these are interwoven with the ‘digital media ecology’ in South Korea.

The research is designed to explore the fine grain of the relations between the particular precarious lives of contemporary Korean young women and their use of digital media. It attempts to answer the following three main questions. What is the nature of the particular precarious lives of Korean young women? What kinds of affects are being formed through their experiences? How are these affects related to their use of digital media? In search of answers I conducted a year-long ethnographic fieldwork study in 2007/2008 in Seoul, South Korea, doing participant observation and in-depth interviews. I adopted an ethnographic approach, as it has been developed by media anthropologists (see CH 4), investigating the use of digital media by those I studied as part of a wider communication processes in their everyday lives. By doing so, this study aims to contribute to a further understanding of how neoliberal social changes are embedded in the everyday life of young women in South Korea specifically through their use of and through the contexts given by digital technologies, which define the broader communicative ecology of South Korea.

This chapter explains the context and background of the research. First, I briefly overview the discourse of underemployed young people in South Korea and the particular situation of young women in the labour market in South Korea. Next, I describe how my own personal experiences of underemployment provided the origin of the idea for this research. To conclude, I outline the research aims and describe the overall structure of the thesis.

2 YOUNG PEOPLE AS *BAEKSU*

For the last decade, the current generation of young people has emerged as one of the most troubled groups in South Korea in relation to their employment. According to Kim et al Yuseon Kim, Lee, and Lee (2012: 5), through the 2000s, more than 50% of young people (aged 15-29) have been economically inactive and the official unemployment rate for young people (between 8.1% and 7.2%) has been almost double of the average unemployment rate for all age groups (between 3.2 % and 3.7%). The official unemployment rate excludes people those who abandoned seeking a job and thus it fails to reflect the actual size of unemployment among young people. Kim et al (2012: 5) estimate that the actual unemployment rate, including those who are in further education or training or simply give up seeking a job, have been three times higher (above 20%) than the official unemployment rate among young people (aged 15-29). In 2008, when I conducted my fieldwork in Seoul, the total number of the actually unemployed reached approximately three millions, which consist of 13% of the total economically active population in South Korea (*Hangyeore*, 2008).

In the 2000s, the term ‘*baeksu*’ began to be widely used in the popular media instead of ‘the unemployed’ as a symbolic figure of people who facing the crisis of

unemployment. In fact, the entire young generation has become a prototype of *baeksu*.¹ *Baeksu* is a popular term referring to people out of work. In the modern Korean era, the term has been playing a critical role in the construction of the ‘normal’ subject of labour by functioning as a model of ‘exceptional and abnormal’ labour. The term first emerged in the 1920s and 1930s, the Korean colonial period, referring to the ‘lumpen’², who were highly educated male intellectuals out of work and thus had ‘white hands (*baeksu*)’ showing their lack of physical work. Later, the term was widely used to refer to the unemployed working class in 1960s and 1970s when South Korea boosted its economy based on manufacture industry. Up till 1990s, positioned opposite salary men, *baeksu* carried the negative meaning of surplus labourers, wastrels who are good for nothing in industrial society. Until 1990s, women were excluded from the category of *baeksu* as they were excluded from the category of ‘labour’ per se (despite the fact many of them worked). It was in the 1990s when young women began to be considered as a normal labour force (See CH 2) and a new term to specifically indicate female unemployed emerged: *baekjo*. *Baekjo* literarily means ‘white birds’, which are swans in Korean. It metaphorically implies young women’s situation: they are fluttering their feet below the water to maintain a peaceful look above the surface of the water.

¹ The phrase, ‘Most young people in their 20s and 30s are *baeksus*’ is often used to emphasise how many young people are unemployed. The *Jungang Il bo* expressed these days as ‘*baeksu* times’.

² The term lumpen originated from ‘lumpenproletariat’. Karl Marx first used the term in 1851 referring to the unorganized ‘under’ class from whom Louis Bonaparte gathered support to come to power. Marx saw they were interested only in their own benefits and thus likely to be obedient to ruling class. Also, owing to their lack of class-consciousness as labour, they did not have any potential to become revolutionary subjects. This cruel perspective still remains in the contemporary debates on the underclass (Gelder, 2007: 3). In colonial Korea, lumpen referred to the ‘lumpen intelligentsia’, who are highly educated male intellectuals out of work. In the colonial society, Korean intelligent males who received modern education in Japan were likely to be unemployed. In agricultural Korean society, where more than 80% of the population were involved in agriculture (Baek, 1987), there were a small number of office jobs. Most of them were occupied by Japanese and required service to Japanese rule, leaving little choice for highly educated Korean men. On the other hand, after the Russian revolution in 1917, Korean intellectual society was also strongly influenced by the wave of Marxism. In this situation, the unemployed male intellectuals cynically called themselves lumpen, forming a specific form of subculture that is decadent and performing as a modern subject in the street (C. Kim, 1999).

The change in the meaning of *baeksu* shows the change in the meaning of unemployment in contemporary Korean society. While the old term referred to the ‘unemployed’ as institutional and fixed idle classes, the new term tends to mean the ‘underemployed’ faced with precarious employment. As Bauman points out, the term ‘unemployed’ assumed ‘people who are temporarily out of a job but are presumed to be “employable” once the conditions return to normal again’ (Bauman, 2005: 68-69). However, for the current *baeksu*, un(der)employment has become a rather normal condition with no premise of future stable employment and thus, ‘*baeksu* life’ becomes a new way of life for ordinary young people to invent or adapt to in the contemporary Korean society.

In the early and middle of the 2000s, two contradictory representations of *baeksu* were contested in the popular media, academic studies, and government policy. In the popular media, some novels described them as ‘jobless and hopeless’ victims who cannot afford to make a living (e.g. S.-Y. Lee, 2006); others as ‘playful and free’ agents who use the crisis as an opportunity to make a new way of life (e.g. J.-Y. Park, 2006).³ In academia, Gilseop Go (2004) celebrated the emergence of an ‘autonomous *baeksu*’ as a new form of labour in revolt against a capitalistic society; M. Noh (2004) distinguished ‘autonomous *baeksu*’ who choose to live as a *baeksu*, from ‘structural *baeksu*’ who are forced to live as *baeksu* after being ‘mentally broken apart’ under the crisis (M. Noh, 2004: 113-114). The term, ‘autonomous *baeksu*’ is likely to refer to the highly educated, unemployed youth (Go, 2004). On the other hand, reflecting on his own everyday life as a poorly paid labourer, Myeongwon Lee, a doctoral candidate, argues that the myth of an autonomous labourer based on the division of the autonomous and the structural conceals the fact that highly educated youth are exploited

³ Ju-Young Park (2006), a female novelist, described herself as an intelligent *baekjo* reading a lot of books.

in poorly paid jobs (M. Lee, 2004: 64-65) and he is therefore highly critical of the division.

Meanwhile, the government and media industry also attempted to associate young *baeksu* with the bohemian image promoted by those who actively choose their way of life, pursuing a new value of work and life. They prefer having a flexible job at their place for the minimum of time, to having a regular job with fixed office hours at an authoritarian work place. From those attempts, a respectable *baeksu* figure emerged, that is 'cultural *baeksu*'. Cultural *baeksu* refers to the underemployed young people who are doing 'cultural labour' in cultural industry (e.g. a film maker). Thus, the figure of cultural *baeksu* can be seen a prototype of a new form of labour as cultural and creative labour in new economy. The productivity of cultural *baeksu* comes from their cultural labour, which is closely related to their digital media use.

More recently, from the late 2000s, the positive representation gave way to the latter negative version in the discourse of underemployed young people. Popular approaches on youth employment problem largely focus on the precarious employment condition of male university graduates as victims (e.g. R. Kim, 2010; G. I. Park and Woo, 2007). Despite the raised attention towards youth underemployment, the situation for young women has largely been ignored. Most studies on female labour focus on married, middle-aged women rather than on single young women. In particular, there has been little discussion in relation to the working and living condition of underemployed young women who are less educated and at the low-end of the labour market.

To the contrary, young women tend to be represented as winners in a new economy by both government and popular media. Since the very beginning stage of its transition towards a 'knowledge based information society', the Korean government has

praised women as a new major source of human capital to lead the service industry in the new economy (Sukjin Chae, 2001). Through the 2000s, popular media have also celebrated young women's gains, focusing on those at the high-end of the labour market. Three types of young women have been prevalent in representations. The first group is of young women who display the outstanding performance, replacing men at the high-end of the labour market. They are single, highly educated, independent, confident, globalized and better-off (e.g. 'alpha girl') (Mo, 2008). The second group is comprised of young women in their middle 30s who succeed in entering high positions in the labour market and through their economic independence refuse to marry or have children (e.g. 'gold miss'). The third group are young women who consume much more than they can afford, conspicuously buying luxurious goods. They pursue marriage with men rich enough to maintain their life style (e.g. *doenjangnyo*, which literally means 'soybean paste girl'). These popular discourses contribute to another - the 'the feminization of labour' discourse that draws on the increase in the rate of female labour force participation to imply that men are thus worse off and that equality policy aggravates men's disadvantages. In addition, women's refusal of marriage and childbirth is closely connected to the discourse of 'family breakdown'. In this way, the feminization of labour is seen to intensify the precariousness among young men.

However, recent empirical studies on the female labour market reveal a contradictory portrait (M. Choi, 2012; Heo, 2013; Keum, 2004, 2011; M. S. Kim, 2006; Y. J. Lee, 2004). They suggest that although there has been a slight increase, both in the rate of labour force participation and in the employment rate, only 50% of women are entering the labour market and female labour as a proportion of all employees still

remains around 40%, paid much less than men (Keum, 2011; M. S. Kim, 2006).⁴

Furthermore, these studies argue that women's position in the labour market has been worse off through the 2000s: more women are likely to work at the low-end of the labour market as temporary workers. In 2009, 73% of female employees were positioned at the low-end of the labour market while only 12.6% of them were at the high-end. In contrast, male employees were evenly positioned across the labour market, with 36.7% at the low-end. Men still strongly dominate the high-end and middle of the labour market, occupying 78.8% and 75.0% respectively. Only in the low-end of the labour market is the women's rate (59.1%) higher than the men's rate (40.9%) (Heo, 2013).

Occupational segregation and wage gap by gender have also intensified through the 2000s. According to Keum (2004), between 1993 and 2000, among female paid labour, the portion of those who are employed in twelve 'women's jobs'⁵ grew from 70.0% to 77.0%. Among all paid workers, the portion of women in women's jobs grew from 44.5% to 49.5% for the same period. Recent studies show that sex-segregation is intensifying during the 2000s (Heo, 2013; Keum, 2004). Also, more jobs for women have been casualised (Y. S. Kim, 2012: 7-9). In 2001, 70.5% of women in the labour market were in non-standard employment and in 2011, 61.6% of them were. (For men, the figure was 45.5% and 40.2%, respectively.) In contrast, over the same period, standard employment was still dominant among men with about 70% of men aged between 30 -54 regularly employed (Heo, 2013). In short, the recent studies on the female labour market show that the popular concept that women are replacing men is misleading because women's employment is highly segregated at the low-end of the

⁴ In 2009, the average income of women in standard employment was only 62% of that of men in standard employment. For female in non-standard employment, the figure felled to 36%.

⁵ 'Women's jobs' refer to occupations where female labour is more than 70% of all employees.

labour market, the temporary and irregular portion that, in fact, exacerbates the gender gap.

Korean young people also show different patterns of employment in terms of their age. Women are likely to be employed in their 20s and begin to withdraw from the labour market with their marriage and childbirth; men tend to get a job in their 30s due to their military service. While young men's employment rate shows a steady recovery between their late 20s and 30s, the situation for young women becomes more precarious when they reach aged 30. For instance, in 2010, 75.8% of young women were employed at age 25 but the figure shrank greatly to 65.6% at age 30 and to 55.5% at age 35. (Keum, 2011). The difference between men and women shows that young women are likely to withdraw from the labour market with their marriage and childbirth. They return later as irregular workers, forming the majority of the temporary labour force.⁶

In the light of this context, this study investigated how young women are negotiating their underemployment and how it is linked to their performance of gender role and femininity.

3 THE ORIGIN OF THE IDEA

The origin of the idea of the research came from my own personal experience as a highly educated single woman who has been underemployed for more than a decade. My personal status of underemployment has influenced the entire process of the research. I graduated with a BA in Media and Communication in February 1998, in the wake of a 1997 financial crisis that generated a remarkable growth of unemployment and greatly stifled the level of job creation for new graduates. In this situation, many young people were forced to accept jobs they were over-qualified for, in terms of the

⁶ While the rate of temporary workers among young women aged 24-34 was 38%, the figure sharply increased to 60% among those in their 40s, to more than 70% in their 50s, and to 95% among those over 60 (Y.-S. Kim, 2012: 7-9).

level of education and wages. I was one of them. My first job was a reporter in a small sized magazine company in 1998. Beyond writing short articles, I was asked to do various office chores including cleaning a freezer and washing dishes. Most of the employees of the company worked until midnight but payment was continually delayed for several months due to the bad financial situation of the company. In the end, several employees, including me, quit together without being paid at all for our work. After having similar experiences with two more jobs, I gave up trying to find employment. Instead, I entered graduate school for an MA degree in 1998. This choice was made with the hope that the economy would recover from the crisis in the near future and the belief that the degree would enhance my chance to get a better job. At this time, the Korean government's policy was investing in universities actively building the cyber class and digital production system (see CH 2). The media department that I entered also began to build a digital media production centre. During my MA period, I worked for the Media Library in Media department, learning webcasting and support services for digital production classes. When I completed the two-year MA course in 2001, the Korean government was attempting to boost its economy by forming a 'venture boom'. With the government's support, many dotcom companies were setting up and I gained a stable job in a small-sized dotcom company. Echoing many studies on IT industry work revealed (e.g. Lovink and Rossiter, 2007), the job required long working hours for a small amount of wage. I regularly worked until 10 or 11 pm and staying at work all night was not uncommon. However, the job did at least enable me to maintain a stable life based on a regular income. But this did not last. In 2001, the bubble economy collapsed and so did this company. I was again unemployed within a year. I next spent one year trying to enter a big company that could provide me with a higher level of security and proper training. However, at age 29, I realized that I was already too old to

become a new female employee and the work experience in a small company did not count as respectable preparation for taking up a career in such a company.

Since then, for more than a decade, I have made a living through several temporary jobs. Though I had several part-time temporary jobs and occasionally even earned more money than when I worked as a full-time regular labourer in the dot.com company, I clearly recognized myself as a *baekjo*, the female version of the popular slang term, *baeksu*, even after I came back to school again as a PhD student. There were several reasons for this. On the positive side, there was a big change in my life pattern. I did not have to go to work everyday and had plenty of free time for myself. On the negative side, although I was often involved in more than two jobs in order to make enough money to live, I often experienced feeling of lack of belonging. I clearly knew that I was one of the ‘disposable items’ for the projects I worked on, doomed to be abandoned. The frequent moving between jobs hindered me from building long-term relationships with people, creating my sense of ‘placelessness’ and thus I *felt* as if I were ‘unemployed’. In addition, my identification as a *baekjo* was strongly connected with the sense of insecurity accompanied by the lack of predictability and precariousness of my situation. The project-based jobs where I worked as assistant researcher usually ended within six months and I could not predict when I could get another job. Furthermore, there was always the possibility of getting fired in the middle of a project without any notice. In fact, frequent unemployed periods between jobs seriously undermined my living condition and I became more and more afraid to say ‘no’ to whatever the boss asked me to do. As such, my *baekjo* identity was formed from the anxiety that I could be ‘unemployed’ at any time and that I was not able to control or predict my situation.

The use of the Internet and a mobile phone enhanced the unpredictability of my life, and its organization in relation to work. Although I was supposed to work two days a week at the office, I had to be ready to work at any point in the whole week. I could not predict when my boss would call me via mobile phone and email some work to do. For instance, a manager called me around midnight and demanded that I complete the work by the following morning. Connected by digital devices, the flexible work schedule demanded me to be ready to work at any time. Not answering a mobile phone was a taboo. If I did not answer a call or switched my mobile phone off, I would be labeled ‘irresponsible’. There seemed no room to negotiate because there were so many people who wanted the part-time job. One day, when I was called to attend a meeting at 6 am the following day, I refused to do so because I had a class to attend; I was fired. I argued that this was unfair treatment but no one supported me. After being fired, I occasionally heard an illusionary sound of a mobile phone call from the manager and had symptoms of mobile phone phobia. Thus, I came to have a hostile feeling against using the digital media. In this situation, I went to study abroad in the UK in an attempt not only to make a better position in employment but also to escape Korean society and its digital media ecology.

However, my attitude towards digital media significantly changed, living an isolated life in the UK. At that time, online space became my emotional ‘home’,⁷ where I could interact with friends and family. I began to actively use a popular online social space, one used by almost 90% of Korean young people at the time, uploading pictures of my life in the UK (such as cooking and going around, etc.). It was of course a selective display of my life in the UK. In retrospect, I consciously constructed my image as single, autonomous, nomadic, cosmopolitan, relaxed, naturalistic, sociable

⁷ For a more detailed discussion on the concept of home, see 4.1 in CH 4.

young woman who fits within the norms of a desirable normal subject within the ‘creative class’ (see CH 3). My photos were used as material evidence to prove the identity that I constructed online. However, my ‘real’ life in the UK had a far different aspect. I was desperately looking for a temporary job for living, moving frequently for cheaper accommodation. The reason that I cooked all meals was not just because I enjoyed that way of life, but also because I did not have enough money to go out to eat. Far from being ‘nomadic’, I went downtown only once a week for food shopping because the traffic fare was too expensive. Of course, all these things were not representable in the online social space, I felt. Although I represented myself online as if I became better off, my ‘real’ life was worse off than in South Korea. (For example, I used to be a part-time lecturer at the most privileged university in South Korea but I worked as a nanny in the UK, an Asian female migrant worker). In this situation, the use of the social media alleviated my precarious life in the UK, allowing me to confirm that I was a normal being through the interactions with people in South Korea. I think that was why I became to desperately use the online space, which I had disliked before I came to the UK. Soon after, however, I could not continue the selective display of my life anymore simply because I could not afford to create events to display my ‘colourful life’ with the evidences (photos) of it. Instead, I began to use a blogging site provided by one of the biggest telecommunication companies, writing online dairies mostly about the difficulties I faced in the UK. I used it as a closed space only for myself, by not allowing my articles to be seen or searched by others. In this sense, for me, the former online social space was a ‘front stage’ to show myself to others; the latter was a ‘backstage’ to hide from them (Erving, 1959: 114). These experiences led me to become interested in the link between precarious life and the use of the digital media.

4 RESEARCH AIMS

This thesis pursues five major goals. Foremost, it aims to document the embodied experiences of marginalized young women,⁸ which are rarely documented despite the increasing attention on the issue. Following feminist studies on marginalized women (Abramovitz, 1995; Essers, 2009; Jarrett, 1994; Krumer-Nevo, 2005), this study seeks a different consideration of their situation ‘through knowledge of their actual, felt circumstances, their limited opportunities, their struggles, and the nature of their difficulties’ (Krumer-Nevo, 2005: 87).⁹ More specifically, by contextualizing their situations and tracking their life and work trajectories, I seek to understand the nature of the marginality of these women in a digital age and their perception of themselves and society.

Second, I investigated how these young women negotiated their underemployment. By ‘underemployment’, I refer not only to their situation in terms of wage, education, and permanence but also to the blurred boundary between unemployment and employment. The prevalence of temporary employment creates a specific form of life involving frequent changes in employment status. While existing related studies tend to focus on the situation of women in the labour market, my initial focus was ‘unemployed’ young women out of the labour market. However, since my informants were frequently moving in and out of the labour market with short periods as temporary workers, it was impossible to distinguish the unemployed from the employed.

⁸ By young women, I refer to single women aged 15-34, considering the extended transition period in contemporary Korean society. Most studies on young people define young people as those in their twenties. However, the extended transition period into the labour market and marriage has changed the meaning of ‘young people’, which is strongly attached to a social stage in the transition period into ‘adult life’, lined intrinsically with economic independence. In Korea, many people in their 30s are still in the transition period. Thus, I extended the range of young people up to the early 30s. For instance, the average age of first marriage grew from 27.5 (women) and 29.9 (men) in 2001, to 30.4 (women) and 32.6 (men) in 2013.

⁹ However, as Krumer-Nevo emphasized, listening to the voice of the marginalized women is not a simple task. Power creates many ethical considerations in such research (this issue will be discussed in CH 3).

Thus, in this study, I am using the term ‘the underemployed’ instead of ‘the unemployed’, to more accurately refer to their precarious employment conditions.

Third, this thesis aims to explore the particular nature of ‘precarity’ experienced by the underemployed women in South Korea. By ‘precarity’, I mean not only insecurity in employment but also in life as a neoliberal ontological condition (See 5.2 in CH 3). With the low level of social security provided by the state, insecurity in employment easily translates to insecurity in life. The extent of the latter depends on what private security can be offered by the family. Thus, this study investigates the complexities in the embodied experience of precarity by young women from various educational and family backgrounds. In addition, it investigates how the old forms of precarity, which has imposed on women in South Korea are combined with the new forms of precarity given by the introduction of flexible employment system, and how it is related to their performance of femininity. In doing so, this thesis seeks to contribute to understanding how the nature of precarity differs according to a specific national, geographical and historical contexts and how young women differently experience the precarity even within the geographical location.

Fourth, I aim to explore the link between their underemployment and their digital media use. Drawing on the autonomists, I see digital media use as a form of ‘immaterial labour’, which produces economic values in digital industry (See 4 in CH 3). In particular, my focus is on how the young women that I studied was forming a particular way of social relations in their negotiation with underemployment, how their digital media use mediated that, and how it was related to the economic production of digital industry.

Finally, I seek to investigate what the shared precarity do the formation of solidarity among the underemployed young women. As the autonomists argue (See 5.2

in CH 3), can it be the foundation of solidarity, forming a political subject as ‘precariat’?

5 RESEARCH METHODS AND STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

To achieve these aims, this study adopts ‘non-media centric’ approach (See Krajina, Moores, and Morley, 2014; Moores, 2005, 2012; Morley, 2009), paying attention to the double articulation of digital media within the life of the underemployed young women. On the one hand, as an essential part of ‘new economy’, the prevalent use of digital media is closely related to their underemployed working condition. On the other hand, digital media is deeply embedded in their everyday lives and so is used by them within and beyond work, and as a way of managing their conflicted lives. In particular, this study explores digital media use as communication processes in their everyday life by investigating young underemployed women’s ‘communicative ecology’ (Tacchi, 2006; Tacchi, Slater, and Hearn, 2003), which is the ‘processes that involve a mix of media, organised in specific ways, through which people connect with their social networks’ (Tacchi et al., 2003: 17) (See 2 in CH 4). Through this holistic approach, this study goes beyond a dichotomy between online and offline modes of communication and attempts to generate a rich understanding of the meaning of the use of digital media to the underemployed women that I encountered.

The thesis mainly draws on a year of ethnographic fieldwork in South Korea (from July 2007 to July 2008). I accessed various underemployed young women at various sites, and collected qualitative data through multi-methods such as observation, participant observation, in-depth interviews, informal conversations and group group interviews. In-depth individual interviews were conducted with thirty young women aged between eighteen and the early thirties. I also interviewed or spoke with various people close to them, including underemployed men, their friends, and co-workers (See

appendix). My research was conducted across various fields – notably it sought to weave between ‘virtual’ and ‘real’ fields. In the beginning, I attempted to conduct research as much as possible with the field of the ‘real’. However, I found the field, where underemployed young women interact each other, itself has become highly ‘virtual,’ heavily mediated by the use of digital media, to the extent that interaction in material space has become uncommon among the underemployed young women. The research process itself thus entailed also a process of tracking and creating ‘fields’. The structure of the thesis follows the nature of the fields that I have constructed in interacting with my informants. Before describing and discussing the stories of the underemployed young women, what constitutes the heart of the fieldwork, I will provide the historical and theoretical background of the thesis. The structure of the whole is as follows:

Chapter 2 takes a historical approach, discussing the transition of Korean society from the IMF crisis on, towards a ‘knowledge based information society’, focusing on the changed labour market and its impact on young women’s working and living conditions. Chapter 3 provides a theoretical discussion on the changed nature of labour, life and social relations in a new capitalism drawing on the autonomist concepts of ‘precarity’ and ‘immaterial labour’. A more detailed discussion on the methodology deployed in the research follows in Chapter 4. Chapters 5 through 8 then turns to the empirical material dealing with my ethnographic studies of underemployed young women’s lives and working practices. Chapters are divided according to the types of forms of life, which women’s age and educational background. These emerged through the research process as a critical factor that conditions the precarious life of young women. Chapter 5 focuses on less-educated women’s experiences involving an extreme social withdrawal. Chapter 6 explores the experiences of young women who graduated

vocational college, doing temporary work. Chapter 7 describes the experiences of the highly educated women who are stuck in permanent retraining. Chapter 8 draws on my encounter with underemployed young women in the 2008 candlelight rally. Chapter 9, as a conclusion, deals with my own reflections on what this fieldwork can tell us about precarity and the possibility of forming solidarity among underemployed young women.

CHAPTER 2 THE ENTERPRISING NATION AND ITS CREATION

1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter explores the neoliberal social transitions in South Korea since the 1997 financial crisis. Although Korean society's neoliberal transition began in the mid-1990s, the financial crisis marked a critical turning point in this process. The first section briefly discusses the nature of the pre-IMF crisis Korean society by focusing on the transition from an agricultural society to an industrial society. The second section looks closely at the project towards knowledge based information society (KBI) led by the Kim Dae Jung (Kim DJ) government under the supervision of the IMF from 1998 to 2002. Locating the Korean transition in a 'knowledge/information society' and through a discussion of the political and social dynamics therein, I will explore how South Korean's formation of national identity as a powerful IT country is articulated specifically within its neoliberal transition. In particular, I pay attention to how the neoliberal transition was widely perceived as a social reformation against the privileged class in the context of the IMF crisis and how it is related to the (more contemporary) formation of the 'enterprising self' in South Korea. The third section discusses the social impacts of the neoliberal transition, focusing on changes in the labour market. It describes how the labour market has become precarious since the financial crisis and how the process of precarization is deeply linked to the feminization of labour. The last section demonstrates how the changes have increased inequality and competition in Korean society.

2 THE FORMATION OF THE DEVELOPMENTAL SOCIETY

The beginning of the 20th century was a devastating period for South Korea. Its formation as a modern nation-state came in the wake of Japanese occupation (1910-1945), the US army military government (1945-1948), and the Korean War (1950-1953), a process that brought with it the mass demolition of the traditional social structure. The early stages of Korea's transition into modern industrial society began during the Japanese colonial period, under the Japanese Empire. However, Korea was then still essentially an agrarian society where more than 80 % of the population was involved in farming (Baek, 1987). With the end of the Second World War in 1945, the Japanese occupation ended and Korea was split into the North and the South, governed by the Soviet Union and the US., respectively. After three years of US military governance, South Korea was finally liberated in 1948 and attempted to build an infrastructure for the nation. However, soon after its liberation, in 1950, came the Korean War, where the Cold War between US and the Soviet Union clashed in Korea. The three years of warfare destroyed not only human lives but also the social and physical infrastructure, traditional residential arrangements of villages, industry, culture, and social order, including traditional rules that had shaped individual work lives (Abelmann, 1997: 403). To this day, the war has not ended. North Korea and the United States signed an armistice, but no truce. South Korea was not privy to a signature.

The war left South Korea as one of the poorest countries in the world. In 1953, its Gross National Income (GNI) was only USD 67, making its ranking 101 out of 125 countries, with more than 40% of total government expenditures dependant on the US aid (Chen and Suh, 2007: 19). Until the end of the 1950s, Korea had remained an agrarian society where more than 70 % of workers were still poorly educated peasant farmers (N. Lee, 1986). From the early 1960s, however, Korea rapidly transformed into

an industrial society – essentially within two decades. The share of the primary sector (including agriculture and fishery) in Korea’s economy fell from 48 % to 16.7% between 1953 and 1980 while that of the manufacturing grew from 9.0% to 28.6% for the same period (Suh, 2007: 35). Also, out of all employment, the share of employees in agriculture and fisheries sharply dropped from 61.9 % to 29.7 % between 1964 and 1983 while the share of those in manufacturing and mining increased from 8.8 % to 23.3 % for the same period (N. Lee, 1986: 100).

2.1 South Korea’s militarized developmental regime: the formation of the state capitalism and *chaebol* (1960s-1980s)

Korea’s rapid transition into industrial society has gained much attention from developmentalists for its achieving such a high rate of economic growth in such a short period of time.¹⁰ In the frame of ‘developmental state theory’, economists and developmentalists emphasize the role of the ‘autonomous state’ in South Korea’s economic growth. ‘Developmental state’ is a widely used academic term to indicate the nature of East Asian states including South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore, who achieved the rapid economic growth after the second World War (Yoontae Kim, 2003: 203). The term emphasizes the active intervention of government. In this section, I will first briefly offer an account of how the South Korean government attempted to create a specific industrial structure and its relation to capital.

South Korea’s initial industrialisation followed a series of development plans implemented by the military government of Park Chung-Hee. With a lack of natural

¹⁰ The South Korean economy grew twentyfold from 1965 (USD 100) to 1985 (USD 2000) in terms of GNP (Campbell and Keys, 2002: 377), maintaining a high growth rate for several decades. The average GDP growth rate in the 1960s was 8.5%, twice that in the 1950s. High growth continued into the 1970s and 1980s. The 1970s had economic growth rates of 8.8% excluding 1980, when the oil shock hit (including 1980, the growth rate of the 1970s was 7.7%). The 1980s’ average GDP growth rate was 9.1% (Keum, 2011: 57).

resources, the initial development strategy of the 1960s focused on the promotion of ‘labour intensive export industries’, beginning with the light-manufacturing sector such as the textile, garment, shoe, and electronics industries. Then, in the mid-1970s, government strategy shifted to the development of heavy and chemical industries, including machinery, metallurgical, chemical, and shipbuilding concerns (Suh, 2007: 19-21). The Park government attempted to regulate the economy by forming close relations between the government, private corporations (*chaebols*), and financial institutions (M. Cho, 2003: 346-347). On the one hand, the Park government built up *chaebols* to drive the economic growth, producing a specific relationship between the private corporations and the government (Campbell and Keys, 2002; C. S. Chang, 1988; Freeman and Kim, 2008; G. Kim, Jung, and Gwon, 1999; Murillo and Sung, 2013). *Chaebol* are Korean family dominant large enterprises. During the 1960s and 1970s, *chaebol* rapidly grew with the tremendous support of the Korean government, including low-cost loans and other incentives, and accounted for almost one-quarter of the entire South Korean GNP in the mid-1980s (C. S. Chang, 1988: 51). On the other hand, the government strongly regulated the *chaebols* through financial institutions. C. S. Chang (1988) argued that *chaebols* were subordinated to the state because the government support was an essential part of their growth and this contributed to forming of a close relationship between businessmen and influential political leaders (ibid: 54). The government’s support of a small number of *chabols* created a severe imbalance between the large and small business firms.

From the early 1980s on, the situation changed in many respects. First, the political situation shifted. With the assassination of Park Chung-Hee in 1979, nearly twenty years of autocracy ended (1961-1979), but another military government led by Chun Dowhan came to power after a military coup. In the 1980s, when the worldwide

battle between Keynesians and neoliberals was underway, the new military government began to implement liberalization policies, including the opening of the domestic market and the privatizing the financial and public sectors. This was done with the support of the World Bank and IMF, who offered a restructuring loan in return for economic liberalization reforms (Y. T. Kim, 1999: 445-446).

In addition, South Korea faced economic problems. With the rapid emergence of a strong Chinese economy, the Korean economy was losing some of its competitive advantages as an exporter between cheap-labour China and high-tech Japan (K. Y. Shin, 2010: 314). In this context, Korean export industries, dominated by *chaebols* such as Samsung, Hyundai, Gold Stars (currently LG), shifted in the early 1980s, from producing for Original Equipment Manufacturers (OEMs) to marketing internationally under their own brand names. As a result, the leading industries in manufacturing changed. Until the early 1980s, the food and beverage and textile and apparel sectors led in manufacturing share, with about half of manufacturing, but the share of these two sectors shrank over the years. Since the 1990s, electrical and electronic products have had the leading role, followed by the automobile and the chemical industries, rebuilding Korea as an industrial producer of high-tech manufacturing (Suh, 2007: 35-40).

In the early of 1990s, responding to the rapidly expanding shares of Japan and South Korea in their consumer market, the OECD and US demanded the abolition of tariff and non-tariff barriers for goods and services in South Korea (K. Y. Shin, 2010: 217). Maintaining its export orientation strategy, Korea opened the domestic economy to direct foreign investment in 1993 and the foreign currency market in 1994. In addition, during the Uruguay Round of WTO talks in 1994, in order to secure foreign markets for manufactured goods, the government also agreed to the opening of the domestic rice market (S. Kim, 2010). Based on its deregulation of the financial market

and the foreign currency market, Korea joined the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in 1996.

During the shift, there was a considerable change in the relation between the state and *chaebol*, with more power and autonomy going in the direction of the latter. Since the early 1980s, the power of *chaebol* dramatically increased in parallel with the rise of neoliberal policies. In the 1990s, *chaebol* began to play a leading role over the state.

2.2 The formation of the labour relations

While developmental economists tend to emphasize the role of ‘autonomous’ state and capital, sociologists have attempted to understand Korea’s economic growth not as merely as an economic process but as part of a ‘socio-politico-cultural reorganization of a society towards growth’ (H.-Y. Cho, 2000: 409).

Most of all, economic growth was achieved through building a particular form of labour relations. Until the early 1980s, South Korea’s labour-intensive, export-oriented accumulation regime depended heavily on the ‘unlimited supply of cheap labour’. Most factory workers had suffered from a severe form of labour exploitation and oppression, working in inhumane conditions (Koo, 1999, 2001, 2004). In particular, female labourers served as a major supply of cheap labour (M. Choi, 2012; Haejin Kim and Voos, 2007: 193; Koo, 1999, 2004). Female labour made up the majority of the workforce in light industries in the 1960s, 75 % in the textile and apparel industries. Even in the late 1970s and the early 1980s, when men were typically employed in heavy manufacturing industries, 40 % of all employees in the manufacturing sector were women (M. Choi, 2012: 246).

The formation of cheap urban labour was closely linked to the collapse of the rural economy during the process of Korean industrialization. According to Nambok Lee (1986), government-led industrialization created a severe gap in the development between agriculture and manufacturing, leading to an exodus of the work force from agricultural areas. The majority of the work force who left rural areas flowed into the manufacturing and the service sectors in urban areas, forming an urban low-income class.¹¹ Female labour in the light industries was also mostly made up of young girls from rural areas, working in factories established in the Export-Processing Zones or in sweatshops in big cities, but supporting their families in rural areas (Haejin Kim and Voos, 2007: 193). According to Koo (1999, 2004), young female workers were subject to the most severe form of labour exploitation and oppression in the garment and textile industries and they became the main force of the labour movement through the 1970s and the early 1980s.

The politicization of labor in South Korea was highly complicated by the official policy of ‘anti-communism’ that had been deeply embedded in formation of the working class and the reconfiguration of labour relations (H.-Y. Cho, 2000; Freeman and Kim, 2008; Moon, 2005). Most of all, anti-communism effectively worked to suppress different voices against the military regime by labeling them as acts in the service of the enemy (H.-Y. Cho, 2000). Labour unions activities were marked as ‘pro-communistic’ and thus ‘anti-national’ activities (Freeman and Kim, 2008). In addition, as a strategy of maintaining compulsory military service, the state linked the labour market and military service by offering economic benefits to veterans through an ‘extra-points system’ that helped them secure civilian jobs. Thus, it reinforced the existing

¹¹ The share of employees in agriculture and forestry dramatically decreased from more than 75 % to 34 % between 1956 and 1980 while the figure in service sector rose from 29.3% to 47.0% between 1964 and 1983 (N. Lee, 1986).

patriarchal labour market (Moon, 2005). Moon labeled this process as ‘militarized modernity’:

The core elements of militarized modernity involved the construction of Korean nation as the anticommunist self at war with the communist other, the constitution of members of the anticommunist body politic through discipline and physical force, and the intertwining of the industrializing economy with military service. The militarization of national identity as such revolved around the ideologies of anticommunism and national security (Moon, 2005: 24).

Meanwhile, the government reorganised the educational system to build a skilled workforce for the industrial industry.¹² The major goal of educational policies in the 1960s and 1970s was to strengthen vocational education. In the 1960s, vocational high schools were set up to provide training in craft skills for the growing labour-intensive light industries. In the 1970s, vocational junior colleges were established to supply technicians for the heavy and chemical industries (A. Kim and Rhee, 2007: 114). At the same time, education reforms were more generally enacted to increase the size of the highly educated labour force, under the banner of ‘equality’. For example, the Park regime abolished the middle school entrance examination in 1968 and equalised high schools, pursuing ‘uniformity of education and equalization of schools’ (C. Kang, 2009). The succeeding Chun regime abolished the university entrance examination and prohibited extracurricular work in the 1980s in the name of ‘equality of educational opportunity’ (S. J. Park, 2007). During the 1970s and 1980s, higher education was expanded in two ways: increased student enrollment and diversification of institutions of higher education (A. Kim and Rhee, 2007: 114). C. Kang (2009) and S. J. Park (2007) argued that the educational reforms by the military governments contributed to

¹² The formal education system in Korea follows a single track of six years in elementary school, three years in middle school, three years in high school, and two or four years in college or university.

building ‘a sense of egalitarian society’ that concealed the basic inequality of Korean society.

2.3 The rise of labour power and the formation of an internal labour market

During the late 1980s and 1990s, there were major changes in labour relations. Through the 1980s, South Korea saw a large scale democratization movement against the military government. In particular, the 1987 uprising of people was a critical turning point in Korea’s transition from military governance toward a more democratic society. More than four million protestors attended street demonstrations across the country from 10 to 29 June 1987 (K. Y. Shin, 2010: 214), so called, ‘the June democracy movement’, producing the declaration of democratic reform of June 29 in 1987 by No TaeWoo, the presidential nominee. This promised major constitutional amendments including a direct presidential election system (Suh, 2007: 23). Large scale labour strikes followed the 1987 uprising, and these greatly contributed to enhancing labour rights and working conditions. According to K. Y. Shin (2010: 214-215), the total number of labour strikes in 1987 reached 3,749 and most of them (2,469) occurred in August 1987. Following those strikes, more workers began to organise labour unions at their workplaces, particularly in the big companies, the *chaebols*. As a result, the number of labour unions increased by 49.6% from July to December in 1987. In addition, labour-related laws, including the three basic labour laws, were extensively revised to promote workers’ rights and guarantee the freedom of labor union activities. Social equity and welfare were also significantly improved during the late 1980s. The minimum wage law and the national pension system were introduced in 1988 and a nationwide medical insurance system in 1989 (Suh, 2007: 23). An equal employment

law for enhancing working condition of female labour was also enacted in 1988 (Jang, 2013).

According to Jang, in the wake of the 1987 great labour strike, an internal labour market was formed with the protection by the labour law, guaranteeing stable employment, increased wages and additional welfare policies. Until the mid-1990s, Korea saw an increase in the number of ‘regular’ employees in the internal labour market and the growth of a domestic market based on stable and increased wages. For this reason, she argued that South Korea transformed itself into a Fordistic society based on accumulation through the circulation of mass production and mass consumption (Jang, 2013: 14).

Meanwhile, responding to the increased labour power and wages in the wake of the great labour strike in 1987, firms began to operate a dual system labour force, one with the central ‘regular’ workers and the marginalized temporary, or ‘irregular’ workers.¹³ According to M. S. Kim (2006: 143-144), to find a pool of marginalized temporary workers, the enterprises began to mobilize the idle labour force including females, the middle and old aged, adolescents out of school, unemployed university graduates, and the like. Unemployed female labour drew the most attention from industry as possible temporary workers. In this situation, married women emerged as a new labour force. Between 1980 and 1992, the rate of labour force participation among married women rose considerably from 35.6% to 47.0% while the figure among single men and single women slightly decreased, from 76.4% and 49.1% to 75.3% and 48.1%. Owing to the growth of married women’s labour participation, the total rate of female labour participation increased from 42.8% to 47.3% for the same period. However, the

¹³ ‘Irregular worker’ is a popular term in South Korea, referring to labour in non-standard employment such as part-time, contract, seasonal, casual, and all other jobs with a specific pre-determined end date. (For more detailed discussion, see 4.2 in this chapter.)

female labour force was differently allocated in the labour market according to their marital status and age, with most of them mobilized as temporary workers (M. S. Kim, 2006: 144), and thus forming a peripheral labour market.

At the same time, the industry attempted to revise the labour laws in order to increase flexibility in the labour market, demanding to introduce laws allowing a layoff system, flexible schedules, and indirect employment. However, this failed, faced with the resistance of labour and civic society. Instead, industry intensified its strategy to take advantage of female labour (Jang, 2013: 14). Those attempts to reduce labour costs were legitimized in ‘the new labour force policy’ by Kim Young Sam’s government in 1993. In relation to female labour, it included three major goals: to mobilize housewives, the elderly, and the disabled in the labour force; to enact a law in order to extend hourly labour and indirect employment; and to extend childcare facilities for working married women (M. S. Kim, 2006). For the reason, M.S. Kim (2006: 147) argued that although the new labour policy pretended to follow the 1988 equal opportunity employment act, in reality it contributed to marginalizing female labour and to introducing a flexible labour system in to the labour market, which aimed not to help women, but to reduce the labour cost to the capital.

3 ‘BUILDING THE SECOND NATION’

The 1997 financial crisis was a critical point of change in the relations between state, capital and labour, intensifying the neoliberal aspects of South Korea. In 1997, Thailand’s financial crisis developed into the Asian financial crisis. The economies of eastern Asia trembled as stock investors pulled out. South Korea was one of those economies. In December 1997, South Korea asked the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for 57 billion USD in bailout funds in order to make up forthcoming payments on its external debts. The IMF required ‘structural adjustments’ with a set of conditions

attached to the funds, including steps to restructure the financial sector, improve corporate governance, further liberalize capital account transactions and trade, and increase labour market flexibility. To meet the demands in its memorandum to the IMF, the then president-elect Kim Dae Jung (Kim DJ) formed a tripartite national council consisting of the representatives of the government, business, and labour. After long negotiations, the council reached an agreement in Feb 1998. In the agreement, labour and business agreed on an earlier implementation of flexible layoffs and legalization of hiring substitute workers while allowing labour unions to engage in political activities. In its turn, the government promised to enhance the social safety net and adopt various measures to cope with employment stability. The business sector promised to share the burden through improvements to corporate financing, transparency and restructuring (Y. C. Kim and Moon, 2000).

3.1 The reconstruction of the economy

Based on the 1998 agreement, the Kim DJ government (hereafter ‘DJ government’) took various neo-liberal measures in accordance with the IMF supervision. The three main goals of the economic reforms were ‘encouraging a market-oriented economy, improving the institutional regime including the government sector reform, and making the transition to an advanced KBE’ (Knowledge Based Economy) (Siwook Lee, Lim, Suh, and Tcha, 2007: 53).

Firstly, comparing the financial crisis to the Korean War, President Kim asserted that he would build a new nation through economic innovation based on free market economy principles. To encourage a market-oriented economy, the government undertook a large number of reforms in the financial and corporate sectors, as well as the labour market, while also driving venture policies. The financial sector reforms

included privatizing national banks and lifting all limitations on foreign investment in the Korean market, forming a ‘global economy’ and the expansion of financial industries (Siwook Lee et al., 2007: 65). In this context, the *chaebol* model was largely discredited, being marked as ‘the culprit behind the economic collapse’ (Song, 2006: 345) for its uncontrolled expansion and accumulated debts, all of which were said to have come about as a consequence of the *chaebol* being favoured by the government.

At the same time, the labour law was amended (13 February 1998) in order to permit flexible layoffs, not only in cases of corporate emergency but also in cases of corporate mergers and acquisitions as well as handovers and restructurings. It also allowed companies to hire substitute workers during labour disputes. This was a significant defeat for the labour movement (Y. C. Kim and Moon, 2000: 62) and resulted in the extensive growth of unemployment and temporary employment.¹⁴ Based on the above reforms, the government pushed its venture policies suggesting venture companies as an alternative business model to *chaebols* (Y. H. Choi and Kim, 2005). In particular, benchmarking the Silicon Valley in the US, the government encouraged IT ventures by offering tax benefits and low rate loans as a new growth engine to recover Korea’s economy, boosting new industries based on the Internet such as e-commerce, information related business, software business, and culture industry (K. Yun, Lee, and Lim, 2002). The government aimed to achieve three goals by supporting small and medium-size firms using new, innovative technologies: nurture cutting-edge technology, modify the resource allocation structure that had focused on *chaebols*, and solve the employment problem caused by the crisis (Siwook Lee et al., 2007: 68).

¹⁴ The Crisis caused massive layoffs, from managerial workers in big companies to manual workers in small companies. The jobless tripled from 658,000 in December 1997 to 1.7 million in December 1998 and the yearly unemployment rate jumped from 2.6% in 1997 to 7.9% by the end of 1998 (K.-A. Shin, 1999).

Second, the DJ government undertook extensive public sector reform, including a change in the role of government role and the privatization of public corporations. Government institutions were restructured towards ‘small government’, a process carried out more actively by the succeeding Roh Moo-Hyeon government. At the same time, key industries hitherto controlled by the state were privatised within several years of the crisis (Siwook Lee et al., 2007: 65-67).¹⁵ All these reforms towards further privatisation were justified not only as a means of eradicating the connection between the business sector and the government (marked as one of the major causes of the crisis) but also as a means to increase government revenues and stabilise the foreign exchange market. In this logic, privatisation was accepted as an irresistible option to overcome the financial crisis.

Finally, from the beginning of the DJ government, active measures to transform the economy towards knowledge-based information were carried out. To join the ranks of the leading nations in the information age, three major areas were given emphasis: technology, culture, and education. This was done along with a series of national projects to build a digital economy such as ‘Cyber Korea 21’ (1999-2002), ‘e-Korea Vision’ (2002-2006) and ‘Broadband IT Korea’ (2003-2007). Notably huge amounts of money were invested into the development of high-information and telecommunication technology and building nationwide broadband network infrastructure. At the same time, with various deregulatory policy measures, the state created fierce competition in the broadband market which reduced the price of internet use and increased its demand (K.

¹⁵ For example, Pohang Steel and Iron Corporation, Korea Heavy Industries and Construction Corporation, Korea Technology and Banking, Korea Telecom Corporation, and the Korea Tobacco and Ginseng Corporation were completely privatised by the early 2000s. Korea Electric Power Corporation and Korea Gas Corporation reduced its government share to around 50% (Siwook Lee et al., 2007: 67).

Yun et al., 2002), leading to a remarkable increase in the number of the Internet users within a few years.¹⁶

Along with these neoliberal economic reforms, the DJ government reorganised and enhanced Korea's social safety net by means of expanded coverage of unemployment insurance and other measures (Siwook Lee et al., 2007: 75). For example, in the late 1990s, Korea's four major social insurance programmes (pension, health insurance, employment insurance, worker's accident compensation insurance) began to legally cover the majority of the Korean people. Also, in 2000, the minimum cost of living system was introduced, providing public support to guarantee minimum living conditions for all citizens.

3.2 Creating knowledge labour

The Kim DJ government also took active interventionist measures to form 'knowledge labour' through educational reforms and public awareness campaigns. This section briefly describes these reforms and takes 'the new intellectual campaign' as an example of public marketing undertaken at this time.

3.2.1 Educational reforms for making 'knowledge workers'

From the IMF Crisis onwards, there was a dramatic change in the rhetoric of educational values from 'uniformity and equality' to 'creativity, excellence, and diversification' (S. J. Park and Abelman, 2004: 648). This was a great departure from the previous education policy under the authoritarian military governments.

Emphasizing 'creative education' to produce 'creative' human capital for a knowledge-

¹⁶ Internet population doubled every year between 1995 and 1999 and nearly tripled from 1999 to 2004 (Townsend, 2007: 402). In July 2001, Koreans spent much longer surfing than any other nation, doubling the time spent by American and more than tripling time spent by the British (ibid: 400).

based society, the Ministry of Education (later renamed the Ministry of ‘Human Capital’) reformed the university entrance system in 1998 with two major changes (*Chosun Ilbo*, October 19 1998). First, the DJ government expanded the proportion of non-examination requirements for university entrance allowing for the selection of new students depending on their specialty, extra-curricular activities, and awarded accomplishments, regardless of academic achievement. Using the slogan, ‘Anyone who is good at one thing can enter university’, the policy emphasised emancipating students from ‘examination hell’. Second, the government abolished the high school grading system giving advantages to students from specialized high schools, including science high schools and foreign language high schools, which were established with the support of the government from the 1980s onward, aiming to educate a pool of elite workers. (People had considered them a promising route to enter privileged universities).

Along with the reforms of the university entrance system, the DJ government undertook two other major reconstructions of the higher education system: one to produce elite knowledge workers; the other to convert ordinary people into knowledge workers. With ‘Brain Korea 21’ (BK21), the government attempted to make a direct and close link between universities and ‘creative’ industries. To do this, massive amounts of government funding flew into higher education institutions. The more privileged universities received the most support (*Chosun ilbo*, 23. 08. 1999). This process widened the gap between universities and intensified the hierarchy between profitable and unprofitable disciplines, even leading to the abolition of some classic disciplines like philosophy. In addition, many graduate students were hired as assistant researchers for specific projects and the topic of their thesis became dependent on which project

they were in. In this way, the university began to transform itself into a site for producing profitable knowledge for the ‘creative’ industry.

On the other hand, the government expanded the ‘life-long education’ policy, first introduced in 1995. The 1995 educational reform required general universities to enhance their characteristics as an ‘open university’ by intensifying life-long education programmes, adopting part-time registration and special admission (J.-W. Lee, Kim, Oh, and Nho, 1995: 308). The reform also allowed vocational high school graduates to advance into a higher education institution. The DJ government introduced the Academic Credit Bank System, as part of their ‘open education’ and ‘lifelong education’ policies: academic credits included not only academic learning in school but also informal learning and vocational skills out of school. In this way, the system enabled someone at work to gain a university degree. Along with the deregulation of university, there was a huge rise in the number of universities in the late 1990s. Many universities developed specialised courses for ‘life-long education’. As a result, vocational tertiary education showed extensive growth from the late 1990s on. The ratio of vocational high school graduates who advanced to tertiary education greatly increased from 19% in 1995 to 75% in 2008 (A.-G. Kim and Shin, 2011: 2). Along with the life long education policy, the government also encouraged local cities to build public libraries, running a national media campaign called ‘let’s read a book’. These public libraries were also utilised to promote ICT literacy.

3.2.2 *‘New intellectual movement’*

The reformation of the economic structure was accompanied by public campaigns for reformation of the traditional concept of labour and work. The ‘new intellectual’ campaign was a key case in point here. Along with the venture policy, the ‘new

intellectual' campaign was pushed ahead by the government as a way of converting people into being venture-minded. In a presidential meeting for economic policy in December 1998, the term 'new intellectuals' first emerged. In a document titled 'The necessity and case studies of New Intellectuals', 'new intellectuals' are defined as 'people who actively create added value using knowledge' and 'people who consistently develop one's work skill in their place, maximising added value, regardless of their educational background or whether they have a certificate of qualification.' (H. B. Choi, 2000: 14) To boost the campaign, the government provided symbolic figures by offering a prize for 'new intellectuals'. One of the most iconic figures was Sim Hyungrae, a little educated comedian who made a film in Hollywood. As such, the cultural industry was described as where anyone who has a creative idea can become successful, regardless their social background. In addition, a retired CEO, who was voluntarily working as a hotel porter, was highly praised for his passion and breaking conventional thought as a new intellectual. In contrast, the organised labour movement against unfair layoffs at the same hotel were criticised as the work of old-fashioned minded workers and it was strongly suppressed by the police. Moreover, young people who set up venture companies were represented as the most desirable model of 'new intellectuals'.

H. B. Choi (2000) argues that the regime attempted to convert industrial labour into enterprising individuals through the new intellectual campaign. Seo (2009: 79-83) also asserts that even though the campaign has been evaluated as a failed policy by a group of scholars, it was successful in building for citizens a model of the new modernised self, defined as an 'enterprising' self imbued with self responsibility. Thus, as Song (2006) argued, the venture policy can be seen part of the construction of

employable and taxable citizens who do not depend on public provisions but are self-sufficient.

4 AFTERMATH OF THE IMF CRISIS

4.1 A new strategy of capital, old labour exploitation

South Korea's rapid growth since the early 1960s was made through 'labour intensive export oriented accumulation'. Its dependency on export industries slightly decreased in 1990s, when it saw the growth of the domestic market based on increased labour wages. However, as the domestic market shrank since the 1997 financial crisis, capital's attempt to gain profit from the overseas market re-intensified Korea's dependency on export industries through 2000s (C. S. Kim, 2009: 61).

According to C. S. Kim (2009), faced with an over-supplied and unpredictable world market, industry began to ensure the pursuit of 'short-term profit' through downsizing and cost reduction rather than 'long term growth' through investment and expansion. Under the name of 'the rationalization of management', industry carried out restructuring that included reductions in the number of employees and wages, converting regular workers into irregular workers. In addition, there was a major shift in the industry strategy to gain profit. While it used to gain profits by creating value through production by organizing and utilizing income labour ('value production'), capital began to focus on gaining profit through transferring value which is created in other places ('value transfer') (e.g. the stock market) (ibid: 61). Industry's market strategy has also changed from price competitiveness to product differentiation, which accompanied the increased emphasis on planning, design, branding, and marketing (ibid: 62). Along with the change, capital has moved its emphasis from the production area into the non-production area, such as planning, design, branding and marketing (ibid: 66-68), marginalizing production. To reduce cost, capital has moved its production sites

overseas places where labour is cheaper. For example, Samsung Electronics moved its factories for notebook PC production to China in 2002 and 2003; LG Electronics also moved its factories for PC production in 1997, 2000, 2003 (ibid: 75). On the other hand, capital outsourced its domestic production. For example, the major telecommunication companies such as SK telecom and KTF outsourced service production, including client service (call centers) and the construction and maintenance of service infrastructure. However, planning, design, research and development remained inside the companies (ibid: 79).

By outsourcing its production, industry achieved not only cost reduction but also the increased flexibility in production. For example, the unit price that sub-contracted firms are offering to the original firms has been decreasing through 2000s. Furthermore, when there is less demand than is expected due to a change in the market, the original firms can control the supply simply by ending the contract with sub-firms. In this way, capital transfers value from and imputes risk on the subcontracted firms. Meanwhile, in the same way, the sub-contractors attempt to gain profit by reducing labour cost and increasing flexibility in employment. While capital has increased flexibility in production through the chain of outsourcing, it has increased flexibility in employment. The change in the industry structure with a chain of outsourcing has two main impacts on the labour market: intensified instability and fragmentation (C. S. Kim, 2009).

In sum, since the financial crisis, the dominant capital's main strategy to gain profit has shifted from value production to value transference, reforming the entire industry structure as well as individual firms within the chain of outsourcing. In this pattern of production, the unbalanced relationship between large firms (*chaebols*) and small-middle sized firms has intensified. In addition, the marginalization of production

has accompanied the marginalization of labour itself, producing a dramatic rise in a form of precarious labour.

4.2 The precarization of labour

The ‘precarization of labour’ and ‘precarity’ are often used to characterize labour market changes such as unstable employment, unstable incomes, and intensified labour in Europe.¹⁷ The labour market changes since the financial crisis in South Korea accord with this definition.

Since the financial crisis, Korea has seen the dramatic rise of so called ‘irregular labour’ (*bijungyugik*, 비정규직). The term emerged in the early 2000s after the financial crisis when flexible employment began to rapidly replace permanent employment since the financial crisis. In the middle of the 2000s, the problem of ‘irregular workers’ rose to the surface and became a major social issue and the term began to be commonly used in academia as well as the popular media. There is no consensus definition of ‘irregular labour’ or ‘irregular workers’ in South Korea, and thus the estimated scales of ‘irregular workers’ are also different. The term is broadly defined against ‘standard employment’ referring to the norm of a full-time, full-year, permanent paid job. The difference between a restrictive definition and a broader definition is whether it includes workers in indirect employment or not. A restrictive definition of the term includes part-time employment and temporary employment, such as ‘part-time, contract, seasonal, casual, and all other jobs with a specific pre-determined end date’, all under direct employment. Many studies use the restrictive definition, referring to non-standard employment under a direct employment relation. An iconic figure is a contract worker under direct employment (Y. J. Lee, 2004: 110). On the other hand, the broadest definition includes

¹⁷ For the genealogy of the term, See CH 3.

all types of non-standard labour including labour under indirect employment, such as the seconded labour and the self-employed. For example, if A company is using a employee who is legally a regular worker of B company, the employee is categorised as a regular worker by the restrictive definition. However, in reality, if the employee is working for and under the control of A company, he/ she is practically employed by A company. However, since A company is not in a direct employment relationship with the employee, A company can fire the employee at any time by ending its contract with B company. In the context, the employee can be defined as an ‘irregular worker’ by the broadest definition. Also, a housewife doing at home labour is considered as ‘self-employed’ by the former but as an ‘irregular worker’ by the latter.

That is, while the restrictive definition is about the type of contract, the broadest definition is about the insecurity of employment itself; while the former focuses on the collapse of the internal labour market, the latter emphasises the expansion of the external labour market. While the popular media, government and many scholars tend to use the restrictive definition, feminist and Marxist studies on female labour tend to use the broadest definition of ‘irregular labour’ (S. K. Cho, 2007; Jang, 2009, 2011; Y. J. Lee, 2004; K.-A. Shin and Kim, 2007). In fact, female labour has been historically exploited under atypical employment and thus it is not a new phenomenon. In this paper, I am using the broadest definition, with the term of underemployment, in order to describe the nature of female labour market in South Korea (This is also a critical issue of the precariat debates in Europe. See section 5 in CH 3).

4.2.1 The institutionalisation of underemployment

The precarization of labour market in South Korea intensified in the middle of the 1990s. According to Jang (2009), since the early 1990s, with the intention to increase

flexibility in employment, industry demanded reform of labour laws to allow three things: a flexible layoff system, a seconded labour system, and a flexible work schedule system. However, faced with strong resistance from the labour unions and civil society, these attempts were not successful. The 1997 financial crisis provided a good opportunity for employers to introduce flexibility into the employment system. As soon as the introduction of the flexible layoff system and seconded labour system in 1998 was established, enterprises displaced a significant proportion of regular workers with irregular workers by outsourcing some ‘non-essential’ tasks or dismissing the existing regular workers and hiring new employees as temporary workers. As a result, in 1999, soon after the financial crisis, the proportion of ‘irregular labour’ began to surpass that of regular labour and the problem of irregular workers emerged as a social issue. Korean statistics began to include various types of non-standard employment into its national survey on labour market participation in 2000 (Jang, 2009: 24). A report by the Korean Labour and Society Institute, a public labour institution, estimated that in 2001 70.9 % of female employees were irregular workers and 45.5% of male workers (Y. S. Kim, 2012: 7).

Jang (2011) argued that the ‘irregularisation’ of labour indicates the collapse of the traditional model of the labour market with a dual structure of the internal and the external. According to her, Korea had pursued to grow the internal core labour market through a strategy based on the exploitation of the (marginalized) external labour market. The great labour strike in 1987 considerably contributed to improving security and labour welfare inside the internal labour market. However, the labour law and policy reforms since the financial crisis led to the rapid shrinking of the internal labour market, blurring the boundary between the internal and external labour market (Jang,

2011: 297). That is, the internal labour market itself was no longer a safe zone, and was subject to permanent restructuring.

In the early 2000s, in response to the spread of ‘irregular employment’, the labour movement demanded the establishment of a legal regulation to forbid employers from employing irregular worker except on special occasions, attempting to rebuild the principle of permanent employment. Meanwhile, in order to extend flexibility in employment, employers also asked for an extension of the range of tasks for seconded employees (Jang, 2009: 25). At last, on November 30 2006, the National Assembly, during the administration of president Noh Moo-Hyun, passed the ‘the irregular labour law,’ including the contract labour protection act and the seconded labour protection act. At the same time, the regime expanded the range of work for seconded employees (Jang, 2009, 2011; K.-A. Shin and Kim, 2007).

The irregular labour law, enacted in July 2007, limits the use of contract and seconded workers to two years and forces employers to hire them as regular worker after that time. However, the irregular law has worsened the condition of the labour market. Most companies simply dismissed irregular workers who had worked more than two years in order to avoid transforming them into regular workers, and began to use shorter termed (less than two years) contracts with new contract employees. As a result, employment permanence was shortened even more than before the enactment of the irregular labour law, undermining labour stability. Furthermore, according to Shin and Kim (2007), many companies began to take advantage of ‘indirect employment’, avoiding any obligations for transition into regular employment. The term ‘indirect employment’ inclusively refers to all types of employment using workers from other company and without any direct contract with the workers, such as seconding, subcontracting, in-house subcontracting, and commissioned labour (K.-A. Shin and

Kim, 2007: 46). Previously, indirect employment and labour supply market were banned by law, but with the 1998 labour law reform to allow seconded labour, indirect employment was now permitted. Since 1998, capital has actively used indirect employment because it is much easier to maintain flexibility by ending its subcontracts than through layoffs. Thus, in addition to the collapse of the principle of permanent employment by the 1998 labour law reform, the principle of direct employment has also collapsed since the 2006 irregular labour law, aggravating the precarization of labour (ibid: 46).

Taking the form of indirect employment into account is critical in considering the precarization of the labour market in South Korea. For example, formal statistics show a decrease of the proportion of irregular workers since the enactment of the irregular worker law. Irregular workers among female employees dropped from 70.9 % to 66.3% between 2001 and 2007. In 2012, the portion of irregular labour among female workers was 59.9%. The figure for men also shows a steady decrease since 2008 and fell down from 45.5% to 39.1% between 2001 and 2012 (Y. S. Kim, 2012: 7). Some suggest that this statistical change indicates an improvement of the female labour market conditions that have come about due to the irregular labour law. However, others argue that the decrease in the proportion of irregular labour, especially of female irregular workers, can be seen a result of the transition from direct employment to indirect employment, not the result of an actual decrease in the labour market. The next section deals with a more detailed discussion on this issue.

4.2.2 Intensified female underemployment

The greatest victims of the restructuring process under IMF supervision were workers in weaker positions. Female workers are a case in point. Many studies suggest that within

neoliberal restructuring of the labour market, female workers have been far more vulnerable than their male (Jang, 2009: 24). According to S. K. Cho (1998), between 1997 and 1998, the reduction in the number of female employees (-8.2%) far surpassed that of male employees (-5.3%). In addition, the number of female employees was reduced across all types of occupations including office jobs (-18.4%), service (-6.5) and manual work (-14.8%); male employee numbers decreased only in manual work (-15.3%), showing a rise in office (5.3%) and service jobs (2.4%) (S. K. Cho, 1998, 1999; C. Kang, 2009; L.-S. Kang, 1999; J.-H. Lee, 2001; K.-A. Shin, 1999). According to S. K. Cho (1998), among male employees, daily workers were the greatest victims with a reduction rate of -17.5%; among female employees, regular workers endured the hardest impact with the greatest reduction, -19.7%. The figure for male regular employees was only -6.4. The proportion of regular workers among female income labourers dropped dramatically from 40.7% to 29.8% while that of male workers dipped slightly from 66.2% to 58.9%. A large reduction in female regular employees occurred across the high-end and low-end of the labour market. In the financial sector, married female employees were a primary group to be fired among regular workers¹⁸ (S. K. Cho, 1998).

The situation for the low-end female labour market was much worse. In 1997, 90% of female employees were working in lower positions in small to medium sized firms. According to D. M. Noh (2002), in June 1998, the Korea Federation of Small and Medium Business decided to abolish the 'general affairs' position (which is the typical young woman's office job doing word-processing, accounting, and other office chores), arguing that 'females in the position are just delivering coffee, answering phones, and

¹⁸ Women whose partners were also working - 'couples working in the same company', 'couples working in the same field', and 'couples working together for a living' were implicitly forced to apply for the early retirement programme. In some companies, women were told that their husband would have disadvantages in promotion if they did not apply for early retirement, but their husband would be saved if they retired. A woman who refused to do earlier retirement was likely to be criticised by the majority of male colleague as a selfish wife who did not support her husband (S. K. Cho, 1998).

typing so they are redundant workers.’ Hyundai Automobile also fired all female workers in its indoor restaurant, who were on average in their 40s and most of them breadwinners of their family (D. M. Noh, 2002). Sooner or later, the majority of the dismissed female labour returned to the labour market as ‘irregular workers’ (S. K. Cho, 1998). (e.g. The Korean Federation rehired the experienced female workers as irregular workers.) As a result, the female labour participation rate, which had decreased from 48.3% to 45.2% between 1997 and 1998, began to rapidly increase since 1998 (J.-H. Lee, 2001). On the other hand, the proportion of women who gave up seeking a job increased (L.-S. Kang, 1999). The more educated, the more likely they were to give up seeking a job, so disappointed were they with the unfavourable labour market (K.-A. Shin, 1999).¹⁹

Since the early 2000s, so called ‘women’s jobs’, where female labour consists of more than 70% of employees, have been the major target of outsourcing and indirect employment, not only in private companies but also in public companies. Female cleaners are the typical case. Cleaning is a low-income job for the less educated, middle-aged women. Building maintenance and cleaning job began to be outsourced in the mid-1990s and then, when the 1998 seconded labour law specified ‘cleaning and maintaining building’ as one of the tasks where seconded employees was now allowed, the job became the most typical irregular work (Jang, 2011: 300). According to the seconded work act, building cleaning and security were ‘not essential tasks’ for these businesses, and thus companies are allowed to use irregular workers for these jobs (K.-

¹⁹ The increase of the economically inactive population among females by education between October 1997 and October 1998 (K.-A. Shin, 1999).

| Total | Below middle school | High school graduates | Above college/university |
|-------|---------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------|
| 5.4% | -6.4% | 11.7% | 31.8% |

A. Shin and Kim, 2007: 54). Grounded in the seconded work act, all deluxe hotels in Seoul also began outsourcing their housekeeping starting in 2001. With this change, all of the maids who used to be regular workers became irregular workers. K.-A. Shin and Kim (2007) argued that the hotel room maid case is a typical ‘fake’ seconded labour employment. Even though hotel room maids belong to an outsourcing company, they have been working under the direct control and management of the hotel. Outsourcing companies are also substantially under the control of the hotel.²⁰ Since then, the job of hotel room maid has been degraded to one of the lowest income jobs for women (ibid: 56).

The KTX female attendant strike in 2006 is a case of more highly educated female workers’ resisting indirect employment. The Korea Railroad Corporation (Korail)²¹ hired female attendants as irregular workers with two-year contracts for the newly launched Korea Train Express (KTX) service in 2004 with the promise of transformation into ‘regular workers’ in two years. However, in 2006, Korail asked female crews to move to its outsourcing company. Female attendants refused to transfer to another company and asked Korail to switch their status into regular employees as they were promised. Korea Railroad Corporation simply fired them by not renewing their contracts. The dismissed female attendants organised large scale of strikes in 2006. 380 women joined, occupying Seoul Station and going on a hunger strike (S.-S. Cho, 2010). (After more than 900 days of street demonstrations, they went to the court and are still in dispute.)

Another typical form of indirect employment is the so called ‘special employment.’ It should be considered carefully in relation to the precarization of the

²⁰ 47.1% of outsourcing companies were spun off from hotels and 58.6% of the presidents of outsourcing companies were former-employees of these hotels (K.-A. Shin and Kim, 2007: 54).

²¹ In the Korea Railroad Corporation, the ratio of females among regular employees was only 5% (S. K. Cho, 2007).

labour. According to Y. J. Lee (2004), similar to the traditional ‘domestic work’,²² ‘special employment’ means an employment status in which persons work under the control of their employers but are categorized as ‘self-employed’ such as freelancers and sales persons. The National Statistical Office categorised them as ‘independent subcontractors’, their number doubling from 624,000 to 1,200,000 between 2000 and 2002. This type of employment also shows the highest level of gender division: for women, homeschool teachers, golf caddies, domestic workers, private educational institution teachers, etc.; for men, operators of heavy equipment (such as cargo truck, ready-mixer truck, and tower crane), dispatch riders, etc (Y. J. Lee, 2004: 118). Those who are under special employment are arguably the group of people who are experiencing the most severe level of precarity in the labour market, taking all the risk in relation to their work without any form of protection or security from their substantial employers. Homeschool teachers, more than 80-90% out of who were female in 2004, are the case. Until the late 1980s, homeschool teachers were employed as regular workers with a fixed wage. In the 1990s, with the introduction of the merit system, most teachers began to contract as a self-employed worker who is paid by a commission according to their performance and without basic pay or benefits such as insurance or a pension (ibid: 118-119).

As such, the process of precarization of labour has been closely linked with the traditional concept of female labour as ‘reserved labour’, degrading women’s jobs as non-essential work and has resulted in intensifying female underemployment.

²² ILO defines ‘domestic work’ as work performed in or for a household or households and ‘domestic worker’ as any person engaged in domestic work within an employment relationship. (<http://www.ilo.org/ipecc/areas/Childdomesticlabour/lang--en/index.htm> accessed in August 2014)

4.3 Welfare policy, the rise of social service, and female labour

The government has also played an active role in adopting a flexible labour system. Jang (2009) argued that the regime's job creating policy has significantly contributed to institutionalising a flexible employment system, a policy closely linked with its welfare policy. According to D. M. Noh (2008), the current Korean welfare system is two-sided: the demand for welfare is increasing but the welfare budget is decreasing. In the past, the regime had focused on the reduction of poverty by creating large scale of employment without the need to build up a social welfare system. According to N. Lee (1986: 105), Korea's high economic growth explicitly contributed to reducing the population suffering from absolute poverty, which was 48% in the early 1960s, but had substantially declined to 23% in 1970, and to 12% in 1978. Nevertheless, at the same time, it created other closely related socioeconomic problems, such as a big gap between the large and small business firms, imbalances between the urban and rural sectors, and unequal income distribution (N. Lee, 1986; Suh, 2007).

Since the financial crisis, with the great reduction in the employment in manufacturing and the rise of unemployment and precarization of the labour, the problem of 'the new poor' has emerged in South Korea in the early 2000s.²³ Since the financial crisis, with the great reduction in manufacturing employment and the rise of unemployment and precarization of labour, the problem of 'the new poor' has emerged in South Korea in the early 2000s. D. M. Noh (2002) defines 'new poverty' as relative and mental deprivation and 'old poverty' as absolute and a material problem for survival. He sees 'the working poor' as a typical representative of the new poor. Feminist scholars have recently raised the problem of female poverty, positioning women as the biggest victim of the process towards a flexible labour system (Joohee

²³ The term the 'new poor' began to appear in mass media around in 2003.

Kim and Lim, 2008; T. H. Park and Oh, 2008). A.-N. Kim (2009: 73) suggests women have faced massive layoffs and extensive transformation into irregular workers and have showed a low level of returning to the internal labour market. Combined with the unstable employment of male workers, more and more women are taking the role of breadwinner, even while working as a temporary worker.

However, according to D. M. Noh (2008), Korea's existing welfare system is too weak to deal with these emerging social problems. The existing social insurance system only covers regular workers based on the male breadwinner model and so does not apply in a situation where 30% of all employees are self-employed and half of the employees gaining income are irregular workers. In particular, the majority of female employees are excluded from the social insurance benefit (ibid: 64-65). In this situation, the government has attempted to solve the demand of welfare through the marketization of social service. Through the 2000s, the government outsourced its welfare policy. For example, since early 2000, civic organizations were assigned as the major providers of social service for a 'social enterprises' project. The project aims to transform the young unemployed into enterprisers doing social jobs. In addition, since 2006, the regime has attempted to create jobs for the poor and females by building up the social service industry, where most jobs are low-income and more labour intensive than jobs in other service sectors and also wholly woman-concentrated temporary jobs (Jang, 2009; D. M. Noh, 2008). (The typical example of such a female job is child-care or elderly care). That is, the government has aimed to solve the new poor problem by creating social service jobs for female in low-income family. By doing so, it attempted to make female to support their family.

In sum, the regime has sought to solve the poverty and unemployment problem by creating precarious jobs in the social service sector. In doing so, the regime has not

only saved its own budget but has passed on its responsibility to individuals, especially those who are the most vulnerable and in a position to be protected. In particular, women in poor families have been the main targets, forced to take on care of their family instead of the state. In this regard, welfare policy since the 2000s has been in line with traditional welfare policy, which has long relied on the family as a substitute for the state.

4.4 Inequality, competition, and being global

The precarization of the labour market has created greater income inequality and fragmentation of workers, creating a new hierarchy (Freeman and Kim, 2008; D. M. Noh, 2002; S. J. Park and Abelman, 2004).

The number of irregular workers, including contract, part-time, and daily workers, exceeded that of regular workers, reaching 8.6 millions (54% of income labourers). According to T. H. Park and Oh (2008), irregular workers are under double discrimination. In terms of 'real income', irregular workers averagely earn only 50% of that of regular workers while working longer than regular workers; in terms of 'social income', most irregular workers are excluded from the benefit of national pension and medical insurance. As more people become irregular workers, many people's real income has significantly dropped since the IMF Crisis. The middle class (who earn 70-150% of the average income) has become much smaller, while the numbers of both the lower-middle class (who earn 50-70%) and the poor class (who earn less than 50%) has doubled (T. H. Park and Oh, 2008). The wage gap by gender has widened, so has the gap by education (S. M. Chang, 2007).

D. M. Noh (2002) argues that the problem of irregular workers is not just a matter of a labour market, but also a social and cultural matter forming a sense of diminishing social mobility among ordinary people.

In the past, people had an expectation that if they work hard they can be better off. However, now people think that the life of themselves and their children would not be better off no matter how hard they work. [...] The new word ‘sperm lottery’, which means having rich parents, reflects people’s sense that they would pass down their poverty to their children.(D. M. Noh, 2002: 308)

The sense of blocked social mobility reflects a significant change in Koreans’ sense of social mobility. The sense of an egalitarian society among Koreans during the post-Korean War era is argued as a main drive behind Korea’s dramatic economic growth. In particular, the belief of individualistic open mobility was intensified in the expansion of the middle class in 1990s. However, since the ‘collapse of middle class’ during the IMF era, the long-lasting belief in social mobility has diminished in the minds of ordinary people (S. J. Park and Abelman, 2004).

The change in people’s sense of social mobility is closely linked to the changes in education policy. As mentioned earlier, the military regimes’ education policy of ‘uniformity and equality’ in educational opportunity greatly contributed to forming the people’s sense of Korea as an egalitarian society (S. J. Park, 2007). However, along with the dramatic change in the educational values from ‘uniformity and equality’ to ‘creativity, excellence, and diversification’ (S. J. Park and Abelman, 2004: 648), the education market has also largely privatised under the name of liberalisation and diversification, forming a sharp expansion of the private education market since 2000.²⁴ In 2008, 75.1% of students in elementary, middle, and high school were involved in private after school education. Interestingly, elementary students, not high school

²⁴ According to the *Chosun Ilbo* (29. 06. 2009), the size of the private after school education market jumped from 5 trillion won in 1994 to 10 trillion in 2001. In 2007, it officially acceded 20 trillion won and was estimated that it actually reached 40 trillion.

students, show the highest rate of private education (87.9%) (*Chosun Ilbo* 29. 06. 2009).

The portion of students from the upper middle class among new students at the top universities has increased rapidly as well.

In this situation, people try to gain a better educational background, leading to the dramatic increase in enrolment rates of tertiary education since the IMF (See the table below) (Suh, 2007: 42).²⁵ Since the mid-2000s, over 80% of high school graduates have advanced into the tertiary education. Among them, nearly 60% have entered into four-year university - for an instance, in 2005, 58.3% of male high school graduates entered into four-year university. For female high school graduates, the figure was 59.7% (Go, 2004). The more people get university degrees, the less the value of them. However, having a university degree becomes a basic qualification. In addition, more and more people attempted to improve their educational background by transferring into more privileged school districts. Meanwhile, tuition fees for universities have greatly increased, even while the average income per household has decreased.

Meanwhile, people began to locate themselves in a globalised labour market. As Park and Abelmenn assert, to be Korean now means to be Korean in the world (S. J. Park and Abelmann, 2004: 650). In this situation, people began to attempt to secure their class mobility by gaining the cultural ability to engage in global labour. In particular, English language skill has become one of the important indicators for their competitiveness in labour market. For an instance, among middle class, there was a

²⁵ According to a data from the World Bank, the gross school enrollment rates in South Korea have increased over the all range of educational level (Suh, 2007: 42):

| Education | Pre-primary | Primary | Secondary | Tertiary |
|-----------|-------------|---------|-----------|----------|
| 1970 | 3 | 103 | 42 | 7 |
| 1980 | 8 | 110 | 78 | 15 |
| 1990 | 55 | 105 | 90 | 39 |
| 2000 | 78 | 98 | 98 | 73 |
| 2005 | 91 | 105 | 93 | 90 |

boom of ‘*chogi yuhak*’ (early studying abroad), forming a new type of middle class and middle class motherhood. Until the 1990s, the state banned people from studying abroad before they graduated from high school, in order to minimize the risk of avoiding compulsory military service. However, in 1999, the Seoul Administration Court found the prohibition was against the right of equality, permitting ‘early studying abroad’ before high school graduation (*Chosun*, 19. 08. 1999). Learning English is also a strategy to gain a better position to enter a privileged university. For example, universities select some proportion of new students through non-examination criteria, depending on students’ award accomplishments, such as those provided by success in English speaking competitions.

In this circumstance, combined with the existing education fever as a strategy for social mobility, an extraordinary English education fever has emerged since the late 1990s. According to the *Korean Times* (2006), beginning in the 2000s, each year a large number of elementary or secondary school students went abroad for a short-term or longer-term English education in the US, Canada, Australia, or Europe.²⁶ This English fever produced a new type of transnational families, the so called ‘*kiroki* (*geese*) *family*’: children study abroad with their mother while father earns money in Korea to support his family overseas. In 2004, the number of *kiroki* families reached more than 50,000 (including 28,000 mothers) and they spent about 2.2 trillion won abroad. The strategy of the middle class to enhance the competitiveness of their children was widely reported in the popular media and spread to others eager to catch up with the middle class.²⁷ Compared to *kiroki* fathers who can afford to fly to see their family, poorer

²⁶ The number of elementary students studying overseas has jumped from 212 in 1998 to 6,276 in 2004; that of middle school students increased from 473 to 5,568; and that of high school students from 877 to 4,602 during this period.

²⁷ According to the *Choson Ilbo* (08 January 2007), ‘since several years ago, Korean students have rushed to American and UK middle and high schools. In addition, 107 international schools in Thailand and 30 international schools in Beijing, China are full of Korean students.’

fathers only see off their family at the airport. They were called ‘penguin’ fathers. Other families who cannot afford to send their children to advanced English speaking countries invented another track by sending them to international middle and high schools in lower costing nations such as Australia, New Zealand, Singapore, Thailand, Hong Kong (C. Kang, 2009: 243).²⁸

The role of mothers as a manager (or planner) has been emphasised in the diverse university selection process. It is often said that success in a good university depends on a student’s ‘mother capital’. Mothers are supposed to gather information about various university selection processes and develop a strategy for their children’s success. One student receives a special admission into university for English ability; another for sports ability; the other for extracurricular experiences. That is, cultural capital has become critical in university entrance and to obtain such capital, mothers are supposed to devise and manage the plan for their children from a very early age. S.J. Park’s ethnographic research (2007) on Korean middle class housewives showed that mothers’ desires to foster their children’s mastery of English represented their own class mobility or maintenance.

In the early 2000s, in addition to the boom of ‘educational’ migration, a wide range of people also attempted to go abroad for various other reasons.²⁹ Some people went abroad to avoid their debt payment (*Chosun*, 10.10. 2005). In a 2003 survey, more

It describes Koreans as having built ‘educational refuge camps’ composed of children and mothers in Australia, New Zealand, Singapore, Thailand, and Hong Kong, not to mention in the US, UK, and Canada.

²⁸ According to Kang, this educational strategy resulted in another family breakdown. Indicative of this, from 2003 to 2005 nine fathers of *kiroki* families died and four of them committed suicide, frustrated with their lonely life (C. Kang, 2009: 243).

²⁹ According to *Yeonhap* (03.03.2010), the number of the emigrated people in South Korea reached at its peak in 2000 and has rapidly decreased since 2006.

| 2000 | 2003 | 2005 | 2006 | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 |
|--------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| 15,307 | 9,509 | 8,277 | 5,177 | 4,127 | 2,293 | 1,153 |

than 70% of young people in their 20s and 30s answered that they wanted to migrate to another country, avoiding the domestic employment crisis and bad economic conditions (*Chosun*, 18. 09. 2003). Some employed in companies wanted to study abroad to improve their qualifications, noting the reality that ‘the MBA degree has become a necessary licence.’ Other young people whose parents cannot afford for them to study abroad go abroad on a working holiday visa. Approximately 60,000 young people gained a working holiday visa in 2006 and 2007 (*Yeonhap*, 3. 3. 2010).

CHAPTER 3 PRECARIOUS IMMATERIAL LABOUR

1 INTRODUCTION

Labour plays a fundamental role in our everyday lives. It is not only our means for living, but also an act that carves out our presence (Sennett, 2008). Despite the weight of labour in forming a way of life, which is ‘culture’ in Raymond Williams’ definition (1961: 57), labour had remained ‘the blind spot of communication and Cultural Studies’ (Mosco, 2011: 230). According to Ross, in the social context of the birth of cultural studies, Williams’ disregard on the topic of labour was partly because he made ‘the cultural turn away from economism that characterised the laborist left of the day’ and partly because the position of cultural work was ‘marginal to the productive economy’ in the then Keynesian welfare state (Ross, 2008: 31-32). Since then, labour has been considered as something belonging to economy, located in the opposite side of culture in Cultural Studies (Charusheela, 2011) and questions of labour have been marginal as compared with those of ownership (within political economy) and consumption (within cultural studies) in media studies (Terranova, 2000: 35).

For the last decade, there has been a reverse turn, which is ‘the economic turn’ away from culturalism in Cultural Studies and more recently in communication studies, arguing for the renewal of Cultural Studies by challenging the assumed division between culture and economy (e.g. Charusheela, 2011; Mosco, 2011; Palm, 2011). This ‘economic turn’ in Cultural Studies can be understood in relation to the changed position of ‘culture’ and ‘communication’ in the post-industrial cultural economy, which is based on the vast amounts of underemployed labour. It is also closely related to the change of the nature of labour in post-Fordism, where labour process has become closely integrated in the process of consumption and thus the boundary between work

(labour) and play (consumption) seems very vague. For example, our daily uses of social media functions as a main source from which digital industry makes a profit.

Drawing on the autonomist Marxist concepts of ‘social factory’, ‘immaterial labour’, and ‘precarity’, this chapter discusses the changed nature of labour, life and social relations in contemporary informational capitalism. More specifically, it first traces back to the early autonomist (*operasimo*) theories of ‘social factory’ and ‘class composition’ and then discusses how these earlier theories were developed into the concept of ‘immaterial labour’ by a group of later autonomist theorists such as Paolo Virno, Maurizio Lazzarato, Michael Hardt, and Antonio Negri. Then, it reviews how the concept of immaterial labour was taken up to understand the nature of labour in digital economy within the tradition of Cultural Studies, closely intersecting with the critiques of ‘creative labour’ (e.g. Dyer-Witheford and de Peuter, 2009; Kline, Dyer-Witheford, and Peuter, 2003; Terranova, 2000, 2004). Finally, it discusses how the changed nature of labour is interrelated with the neoliberal labour forces transformations such as casualization of employment and increasing insecurity in employment and life, which the autonomist explores with the concept of ‘precarity’, the material condition of immaterial labour.

2 NEW FORMS OF SOCIAL RELATIONS: ‘SOCIAL FACTORY’

In terms of the changed relations among society, labour, and informational technology in contemporary capitalism, two contradictory views have dominated academic debates. In the dominant tradition, the liberal democratic theorists (Bell, 1973; Drucker, 1957; Machlup, 1962) have predicted that technological growth will lead us to a new world of affluence and stability, where the class-based struggles and conflicts of the industrial society disappear. For instance, in response to capital’s global triumph in the social context of the rise of the information society and the fall of Marxism, Daniel Bell

(1973) foresaw a transformation in the nature of capitalist society from old capitalism governed by the capitalist class into new capitalism dependent on technology and production and distribution of information, Known as a 'post-industrial society' or a 'knowledge society'. He predicted that a new knowledge class of 'well-trained scientific and technical workers' would lead to steady economic growth and the decline of class-based ideological struggle (Mckercher and Mosco, 2007: vii). On the other hand, the antagonist tradition including those such as Harry Braveman (1974), sees the unlimited expansion of new technologies as a disaster to workers, which will lead the vast majority of workers to ultimately face not only degradation of labour through deskilling but also the intensification of surveillance, exploitation and segregation in the workspaces (Brophy, 2011; Brophy and Peuter, 2007; Dyer-Witthford, 1994). Although the latter provides a vital antidote to the information society utopianism of the former, according to Dyer-Witthford, it has two significant limitations: it romanticises the forms of industrial labour which are already manifestly dehumanizing and only produces a radical pessimism without any revolutionary possibility which Marx hoped for (Dyer-Witthford, 1994: 87).

Positioned against or between the utopian theories of the knowledge worker and the dystopian theories of the degradation of labour (which tend to assume a technological determinism), the autonomist theorists such as Paolo Virno, Maurizio Lazzarato, Micheal Hardt, and Antonio Negri view the potential of information technologies not only as instruments for extending capital's exploitation but also as tools of resistance for workers (Hardt, 1999; Hardt and Negri, 2000, 2004; Lazzarato, 1996, 2009; Negri, 1989; Virno, 2004, 2007; Virno and Hardt, 1996). For them, the exploitation of workers has hardly disappeared, but neither has labour's capacity to respond in new capitalism. They argue new capitalism based on information technology

has not only a different set of vulnerabilities but also an additional set of antagonisms (Dyer-Witheford, 1994: 92-93). Their double-edged position on information technology has drawn on the early theories of the Italian *operaismo* (workerism, the root of the autonomists), particularly around two concepts: ‘social factory’ and ‘class composition’. Tracing back to these concepts is a useful point of departure for understanding the autonomists’ double-edged position.

2.1 Social factory

Responding to the failure of parliamentary democracy and political movements in 1950s and 1960s, by the late 1960s, a non-Communist and extra-parliamentary Left had formed in Italy, labeled *operaismo* (‘workerism’, which in 1973 evolved into ‘*autonomia*’) (Bowring 2004).³⁰ *Operaismo* turned away from party orthodoxy by advocating a militant re-reading of Marx. The most influential work of Marx to them were the then newly available major texts: ‘Results of the immediate process of production’ and the *Grundrisse* (Bowring, 2004: 102).³¹ Drawing on these works, the most essential concepts had begun to emerge between the 1960s and the early 1970s.

³⁰ According to Bowring (2004), in Italy in the 1950s, Gramsci’s theory of hegemony was already widely circulated among the Left. Corresponding with the political optimism created by the new democratic republic, Gramsci’s theory contributed to working-class parties to accepting the merits of parliamentary democracy, rejecting anarcho-syndicalism, and considering the state as ‘a potential mechanism for national solidarity and socialist reconstruction’. However, the political consensus was soon weakened over ‘a decade of unbroken political rule by the Christian Democrat Party, the preservation of repressive legislation, and the survival in office of many civil servants from the previous Fascist regime’ (ibid: 102).

³¹ The former, which is commonly called as the ‘missing chapter’, was originally planned by Marx to be Part Seven of Volume 1 of *Capital*, but then abandoned. Then, in 1933, it was first published in Russian and German, printed in Moscow. However, it was only in the late sixties that it became an object of serious study by Marxists after it was reprinted in German and other Western European languages and finally added to the English edition of Volume 1 of *Capital* as an Appendix in 1976 (Marx, 1976: 943). The latter, *Grundrisse*, is a series of seven notebooks for the purpose of self-clarification during the winter of 1857-8. The manuscript was lost and then first published only in 1953 in German and translated into English in the early 1970s. As the only example of a major set of Marx’s mature writings, it provides many

A central concern of *operaismo* was the question of technology and social relations in what Marx had called ‘real subsumption’ (Thoburn, 2001: 77). In the ‘Results of the immediate process of production’, Marx characterises the transition from the early years of capitalist manufacture to the emergence of large-scale industry based on mechanisation partly in terms of a shift in the form of surplus value: from ‘formal subsumption’ and ‘real subsumption’. According to Marx, in the early years of capitalist manufacture, surplus value was created by means of extending working days, which is ‘absolute’ surplus value. However, it reached its limit due to both labour’s physical limit and the legal limitation of working hours. Thus, surplus value began to increase primarily by improving productivity (‘relative’ surplus value) (Bowring, 2004: 103-104). This transition means a shift from the ‘formal’ to ‘real’ subsumption of labour under capital (Mandel, 1976), where ‘labour and social life itself become enmeshed or “subsumed”, and hence transformed, in the intricate processes of machinery in large-scale industry’ (Thoburn, 2001: 77) and thus, the unity of the labourer, already broken down in simple cooperation in manufacture, is radically absorbed in a system driven by an ‘automation consisting of numerous mechanical and intellectual organs, so that the workers themselves are cast merely as its conscious linkages’ (Marx, 1976: 692).

Recognising the development of capitalized social activity, Tronti returned to Marx’s concept of ‘real subsumption’. While neo-Gramscians considered the relative autonomy of the social democratic political, Tronti argued that the social was becoming increasingly subordinated to capitalist regimes of production (Thoburn, 2001: 78).

Tronti called the development of capitalized social activity as ‘social factory’:

The more capitalist development advances, that is to say the more the production of relative surplus value penetrates everywhere, the more the circuit production-distribution-exchange-consumption inevitably

sources to understand the inner logic of *Capital* and Marx’s methodology, thus challenging the existing interpretation of Marx. (Marx, 1973: 7)

develops; that is to say that the relationship between capitalist production and bourgeois society, between the factory and society, between society and the state, become more and more organic... [S]ocial relations become moments of the relations of production, and the whole society becomes an articulation of production. In short, all of society lives as a function of the factory and the factory extends its exclusive domination over all of society. (Tronti in 1962 in *Quaderni Rossi* no.2, cited in Thoburn, 2001: 78)

In this situation, it becomes hard to speak of the factory as the privileged location of the extraction of surplus value and the sectors that were seen as marginal to production have become tightly integrated into the circuits of capital, thus ‘the process of composition of capitalist society as a unified whole no longer tolerates the existence of a political terrain which is even formally independent of the network of social relations’ (Thoburn, 2001: 78).

The concept of ‘social factory’ was elaborated upon further by the feminist wing of autonomist Marxism. In *The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community*, Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Selma James (1972) analysed the relationship of women’s unpaid work to capitalist production and argued that women’s domestic labour function as an integral component of capitalist accumulation as ‘reproductive labour’. They argued that women’s domestic labour (such as child-bearing, child-raising, cooking, shopping, education, cleaning, caring for the sick, emotional sustenance) played a crucial but invisible role within the social factory (Anderson, 2000). Others applied the concept to analyse the situation of other unwaged groups such as students (Dyer-Witheford 1999: 67).

2.2 Class composition

While the social factory offers a theoretical ground of the expansion of capitalist exploitation to the autonomist theory on information society, its’ emphasis on the possibility of resistance is greatly indebted to another central conceptual innovation of

operaismo: the theory of ‘class composition’. Drawing on his involvement with the industrial shop-floor militancy of northern Italy (Dyer-Witheford 2005: 136),³² Tronti (1964, 1972, 1973, 1980) highlighted the role of workers’ struggles in forming the dynamic of capitalist development. As he stated, ‘We too have worked with a concept that puts capitalist development first, and workers second. This is a mistake’ (Tronti, 1964). Drawing on Marx’s observation that, ‘the initial impetus for capital’s intensifying use of industrial machinery came from proletarian movements’ demanding the shortening of the working day’ (Dyer-Witheford 1999: 66), Tronti theorised the history of capitalism as ‘the history of the successive attempts of the capitalist class to emancipate itself from the working class’, turning away from the orthodox historical materialism that saw it as, ‘the unfolding structural imperatives of capital’ (Bowring, 2004: 104). By doing so, Tronti reinterpreted Marx as a class struggle determinist, rather than an economic determinist (as defined by orthodox historical materialism).

3 NEW CAPITALISM: *EMPIRE* WITH IMMATERIAL LABOUR

In *Empire* (2000), Hardt and Negri ambitiously draw a big picture of the conditions of work, forms of subjectivity, and types of struggles in contemporary capitalism by combining the autonomist theories of social factory and class composition with the work of the post-structural philosophers Gilles Deleuze, Felix Guattari, and Michel Foucault (Dyer-Witheford and de Peuter, 2009: xix-xx). Expanding the theory of social factory into a global level, they argue the emergence of a new form of *Empire* governed

³² The ‘*operaismo*’ movement was most influential in the North of Italy, whose overcrowded cities had absorbed 4 million migrants from the rural South since 1951. Many of these workers had a history of non-union militancy against wealthy landowners, and they faced aggressive discrimination in their search for jobs and housing. These groups of militants and intellectuals, often with the participation of activists from the student movement, successfully mobilized workers at the Pirelli rubber factory in Milan and at the Fiat plants in Turin (Bowring, 2004: 107-108). By the late 1960s, factory workers made up the core of the social movements, receiving much attention from revolutionary students and intellectuals (Hardt, 1996: 2)

by global capitalism (beyond the power of nation-states). The new empire is ‘a new planetary regime in which economic, administrative, military, and communicative components combine to create a system of power “with no outside”’ (ibid: xix). While the old empires such as the Roman Empire expanded their geographical scope using the roads, the new empire expands its social scope through the connections of digital networks, working through Foucault’s biopower exploiting social life in its entirety (ibid: xx).

Underlining the central role of digital networks in the process of economic production in contemporary global capitalism, Hardt and Negri and others autonomist theorists proposed ‘immaterial labour’ as a new hegemonic form of labour within this system (Hardt, 1999; Hardt and Negri, 2000, 2004; Lazzarato, 1996; Virno, 2004). The term was initially articulated by Lazzarato as ‘labour that produces the informational and cultural content of the commodity’ (1996: 133) (as opposed to ‘material labour’ which produces material goods). The ‘informational’ aspect is related to the automation of the work process, requiring skills involving cybernetics and computer control. The ‘cultural’ aspect is related to workers’ activities traditionally considered as non-labour, including workers’ communicative intellectual ability. Through this transformation of work, workers’ subjectivity becomes the content of ‘valorization’, the process by which capital creates surplus value in the labour process in Marx’s term (Virno and Hardt, 1996: 264), while being put into the activation of productive cooperation and the production of the cultural contents of commodities. As such, Lazzarato’s immaterial labour has two connotations that refer not only to ‘the emergence of nonmaterial commodities and their attendant mode of production’ but also to ‘the increasing subsumption of lived experience (leisure, personal relationships) into means of generating more capital’ (Taylor, Bergstrom, Jenson, and Castell, 2015: 372).

Later, Hardt and Negri expand the definition of immaterial labour by adding the ‘affective’ aspect of it (Hardt, 1999; Hardt and Negri, 2000, 2004), as creating ‘immaterial products, such as knowledge, information, communication, a relationship, or an emotional response’ (2004: 108). In *Multitude* (Hardt and Negri, 2004), immaterial labour is more specifically defined in two principle forms: intellectual or linguistic labour and affective labour. While the former implies the importance of the production of ideas, symbols, codes, texts, linguistic figures, and images within the extensive use of computers in work processes, the latter does the production of affects, such as feelings of ease, well-being, satisfaction, excitement, or passion with the expansion of service work. The most typical example is the caring work in health service, the manipulation of affect in entertainment and culture industry, and personal service in the service industry (from fast food chains to financial services) (Hardt and Negri, 2004: 107-108).

More importantly, in their formulation, affective labour means not only labour that produces a particular immaterial product (affect), but also ‘bio-political labour’ that creates social relations and ultimately social life itself (Camfield, 2007; Hardt and Negri, 2004; Schultz, 2006). This nature of affective labour as embodied, bio-political labour, producing social relationships and forms of life, works as the theoretical foundation of their definition of *Empire* as social factory working through the regime of ‘biopower’ (Foucault, 1990: 135-145), and blurring the old division between production and reproduction:

The powers of production are in fact today entirely biopolitical; in other words, they run throughout and constitute directly not only production but also the entire realm of reproduction. Biopower becomes an agent of production when the entire context of reproduction is subsumed under capitalist rule, that is, when reproduction and the vital relationships that constitute it themselves become directly productive. Biopower is another name for the real subsumption of society under capital, and both are

synonymous with the globalized productive order. Production fills the surfaces of Empire; it is a machine that is full of life, an intelligent life that by expressing itself in production and reproduction as well as in circulation (of labor, affects, and languages) stamps society with a new collective meaning and recognizes virtue and civilization in cooperation (Hardt and Negri, 2000: 364-365).

Furthermore, following feminist views on women's reproductive labour not only as the site of exploitation, but also as the site of subversion, affective labour is imagined as a site of the communist potential of biopower (Weeks, 2007). In sum, for the autonomists, the globalised and generalised shift of affective labour can be seen not only as the expansion of capitalist exploitation into the realm which used to be considered outside of capital valorization, but also as the potential to resistance because the production of affect in our labour and our social practices (through human interaction) is directly related to the constitution of communication and collective subjectivities (Virno, 2004; Hardt 1999).

The theory of Empire and immaterial labour drew fierce criticism, both in the autonomist Marxist tradition and in more traditional Marxist traditions. Most of all, more traditional Marxists highlight the continuing importance of the nation-state for capitalist power (e.g. US hegemony as a force driving globalization) and the continued subordination of the global South to Northern capital, which are underestimated in the concept of a decentred transnational Empire (Dyer-Witheford and de Peuter 2009: xxii). In this respect, they see the contemporary capitalism not as a new empire, but as an extension of old form of imperialism along with persistent military forces.

Their concept of immaterial labour is widely criticized for overestimating the importance of information work at the expense of older forms of material work. Opposed to the alleged hegemony of immaterial labour, the opponents emphasize the fact that traditional industrial (or material) labour still accounts for a significant portion of total labour and plays a critical role in the process of surplus value creation

(Caffentzis, 1998, 2009; Caffentzis and Federici, 2009; H. Jeon, 2014; Wright, 2005).

In particular, Caffentzis and Federici (2009) are so critical that they argue for completely abandoning the concept because its over-emphasised homogeneity in labour flattens the differences that exist amongst various labour and classes, making the extended inequality invisible:

Capitalist accumulation has thrived precisely through its capacity to simultaneously organize development and underdevelopment, waged and unwaged labour, production at the highest levels of technological know-how and production at the lowest levels. (Caffentzis and Federici, 2009)

Camfield (2007) also criticizes that its ahistorical aspect ignores various forms of labour constructed in diverse historical contexts and thus bars us from investigating the diversity of different types of labour in various historical locations.

The concept of immaterial labour as affective labour is also challenged by many objections. A key issue is the thesis of the dissolution of boundaries between production and reproduction. Although it is highly praised as one of the most fascinating aspects of Hardt and Negri's theory for expanding the concept of production beyond a narrowly economic sense (Camfield 2007: 30), there is a huge tension around the implication of this shift. Related to this phenomenon, many ethnographic feminist studies show a notable shift of affective labour from reproductive unpaid labour into productive paid labour (e.g. Anderson, 2000; Hochschild, 1983, 2012; Hochschild and Ehrenreich, 2003). They show how women's reproductive work has been rediscovered as a vital source of surplus value and how the commercialised domestic work intersects with the global flow of female labour in new economy, being unevenly experienced according to race and class. Similarly, in South Korea, many activities that were traditionally undertaken by unpaid female labour have become majorly targeted sectors for job creation by the government in the 2000s (See CH 2). These studies show that the shift is strongly grounded on the continuing solid hierarchy between productive (paid) labour

and reproductive (unpaid) labour, rather than the dissolution of them. For example, as Anderson (2000) shows, middle class women prefer to outsource childcare (reproductive labour) for their careers in a paid job while migrant women leave their child for the paid labour taking care of somebody else's child. As such, reproductive domestic labour remains solid working as a ground for exploiting female labour, in forming a revival of slavery, servant and sex labour of underprivileged women (Anderson, 2000; Hochschild and Ehrenreich, 2003). In this regard, Schultz argues that the shift in a hegemonic female subjectivity from a housewife to a successful career woman reflects the reality of labour relations where 'reproductive labor disappears into the holes and gaps of the patchwork that is the neoliberal working day' (2006: 81).

Weeks (2007) points out that this shift has formed a complicated gender relation to labour. She argues, as Virno (2004) argues, the old distinction between production and reproduction has become inadequate and its reproduction cannot be identified with a particular gender. But, new economy also has the persistent gender division of work in that women are still responsible for the privatized work of care. In this context of post-Fordism, the generalised practice of affective labour integrates the separate spheres of male work and female work, forming the 'paradoxical intensification and erosion of gender itself' in the labour market (Weeks, 2007: 238-239).

As such, for many feminists, prevailing affective labour in new economy means the expansion of commercialisation of social and intimate life (e.g. Hochschild, 2012), instead of offering a potential power for building solidarity as the autonomists hope.

4 NEW FORMS OF LABOUR: CREATIVE LABOUR, FREE LABOUR, AND PLAYBOUR

Despite fierce criticism, by the late 2000s, 'immaterial labour' has become one of the fashionable concepts, being taken up to explore how digital media use is integrated into

value creation in the new economy, with increasing concern of its material condition of underemployment in the field of Cultural Studies and more recently media studies (Andrejevic, 2009, 2010; Arvidsson, 2005, 2007; Brophy, 2011; Brophy and Peuter, 2007; de Peuter, 2015; Dyer-Witheford and de Peuter, 2009; Kline et al., 2003; Ross, 2012; Scholz, 2012; Taylor et al., 2015; Terranova, 2000, 2004). This was partly an attempt to build an alternative framework against the dominant discourse of ‘creative economy’ and ‘creative labour’ in the 2000s.

In the beginning of the new millennium, building a ‘creative economy’ emerged as the top policies for governments to pursue. According to de Peuter (2011), in the UK, after its 1997 election, the New Labour government adopted the term ‘creative industries’ as a ‘vast canopy covering film and television, design, advertising, software, publishing, fashion, the visual arts, and so on’. Creative industries become defined as those, ‘based on individual creativity, skill and talent with the potential to create wealth and jobs through developing intellectual property’ (ibid: 418). The chief academic consultant for the policy was Richard Florida (2002). In line with the dominant discourse of the ‘knowledge society’, Florida urges that the urban environment can be an important factor in luring the creative talent, which he labels as a new creative class that drives the increasingly central immaterial activities of technological, cultural and social innovation. The creative class is defined as a particular group of people producing ‘creativity’ with its unique skills in immaterial production and innovation (Arvidsson, 2007: 8). According to Ross, in the aftermath of the dot.com burst, the creative economy logic works at the scale of empire from global bodies like the United Nations pitching the creative economy as a ‘new development paradigm’, to diverse national governments adopting similar creative-industry policies and thereby replacing

the discourse of ‘knowledge class’ with ‘creative class’ (Ross, 2008).³³ In Ross’s view, its success as a global policy is closely integrated with the needs of neoliberal governments to create jobs within a certain period of time with low levels of public investment. According to him, the creative industry does not require much public investment while manufacturing industry needs cost-intensive institutional supports and expensive technical infrastructure; while manufacturing industry does offshore outsourcing, the creative industry cannot be transferred to another country. In addition, this also fits into the capitalists’ strategy to expand their market, through utilising marginalised labour pools (Ross 2008: 33). In the transition to creative economy, cultural (or artistic) labour, which, in Raymond Williams’ times, used to be marginal to the productive economy, are now newly labeled as ‘creatives’, being located front and centre within the neoliberal programs rooted in entrepreneurial selfhood paradigms (Ross 2008: 32).

The concept of immaterial labour has offered a useful theoretical foundation to break the myth of ‘creative labour’ of the ‘creative industry’. For instance, drawing on autonomist concepts such as ‘immaterial labour’ and ‘general intellect’, Arvidsson (2005, 2007) asserts that the real source of creativity in the creative industry comes mostly from the unemployed youth in subcultural scenes (‘creative proletariat’), not the salaried art directors and advertising executives (‘creative class’). What the creative class does is simply connect these unemployed youth’s voluntary and autonomous creative production to the value-circuits of the capitalist economy.

In particular, Terranova and Dyer-Witheford are two most influential scholars who have developed the concept of immaterial labour in their analysis of the relation

³³ South Korea is no exception. The Noh Moo-Hyun administration (2003-2006) actively adopted the creative industry policy in line with the knowledge based economy policy of the Kim Dae Jung administration (1998-2002) and forming creative talent became one of the primary goals of the educational policies. This policy continues the present day.

between digital media use and economic production within the realm of ‘interactive and participatory’ digital culture, where, they argue, a vast amount of underemployed youth’s participation is largely exploited (Dyer-Witheford, 1994, 1999, 2005, 2006; Dyer-Witheford and de Peuter, 2009; Kline et al., 2003; Terranova, 2000, 2004).

Drawing on the works of the autonomist theorists such as Virno and Lazzarato, Terranova (2000, 2004) moves away, not only from the liberal perspective on digital economy as new economy with knowledge workers, but also from an anti-capitalist view of digital economy, as a gift economy, with digital artisans.³⁴ Criticising their common assumption of the formation of new workers outside of the alienated labour process in digital economy, Terranova argues that the blurred territory between production and consumption does not signal the recomposition of the alienated Marxist worker as: ‘the Internet does not automatically turn every user into an active producer, and every worker into a creative subject’ (2000: 35). Instead, understanding the reality of the Internet as part of the development of late post-industrial societies where production has integrated consumption (circulation) and where vast amounts of underemployed labour is exploited, Terranova describes ‘the digital economy as a specific mechanism of internal “capture” of larger pools of social and cultural knowledge’ (2000: 38) which is not limited to a particular group of workers like ‘knowledge or creative workers’ but belongs to the post industrial productive subjectivity as a whole. For Terranova, immaterial labour, as a form of cultural and

³⁴ In dominant tradition, Don Tapscott (1995) defined the digital economy as a new economy based on the networking of ‘human intelligence’ and ‘knowledge worker’, arguing the end of Marxist alienation in the industrial economy (Terranova, 2000: 37). In the antagonist tradition, Barbrook (1999) defined the digital economy as a mixed economy with a public element, market-driven element, and a gift economy element. In response to the sharing culture in cyberspace over the world, he saw a huge possibility for the ‘gift economy’, where new types of workers (the ‘digital artisans’) are forming through free information exchange via new technologies (computer network). He argued that the Internet is inherently anti-capitalist. Barbrook (2000) argues that the users of the Net contributed to forming collective knowledge by being part of the ‘gift economy’ based on the free exchange of information, forming a sort of ‘cyber-communism’.

technical activity in Lazzarato's definition (Lazzarato, 1999), exists as a 'virtuality', an undetermined but very sensitive capacity to the power relations of the digital economy. Thus, the primary aim of the digital economy is to 'channel' the undetermined virtuality into the process of value creation:

In the highly skilled worker, their capacities are already there. In the young worker, the 'precarious worker', and the unemployed youth, these capacities are 'virtual', that is they are there but are still undetermined (2000: 41).

In this sense, she calls the use of the digital media by ordinary people 'free labour' with a double meaning in 'free' as 'unpaid and not imposed (thus pleasurable)' (2000: 48), and a fundamental moment in the creation of value in the digital economies.

Meanwhile, Dyer-Witheford has taken up the concept of immaterial labour as a useful tool for the investigation of the changed nature of labour in digital economy, particularly in game industry (1994, 1999, 2005, 2006; with de Peuter 2009; with Kline and de Peuter 2003). Highly evaluating its advantage in investigating the changed nature of labour and class composition in an informational capitalist society (Dyer-Witheford, 1994, 1999, 2005, 2006), he has attempted to save the concept by decentring immaterial labour from the privileged spot:

[T]he attention paid to 'immaterial' laborers be balanced by equal attention to at least two other groups-'material' and 'immiserated' workers. If immaterial labor is characterised according to its communicational and affective activity, then material labor is that type of work still primarily focused on shaping the physicality of products ... which obstinately refuse to dematerialize themselves; and immiserated labor is that part of labor force which, through various gradations of precarious and contingent employment up to the short-and long-term reserve army of the unemployed, is treated by capital as simply surplus to requirements (Dyer-Witheford, 2005: 155).

He argues to resituate 'immaterial labor' as one component of a broader composition of 'universal labor' because the intersection among a wide variety of different types of labour, waged and unwaged, is 'complex, intractable, and cannot be ironed out by the

concept of immateriality’ (Dyer-Witheford, 2005: 155). As a way to do so, he suggests a renewed attention to Marx’s term, ‘species being’, which ‘foregrounds the corporeal, sensual, sexual, gendered, and environmentally embedded condition of human existence, as well as the collective and historically changing content of this embodiment’ (2005: 159-160).

Developing this perspective, more recently, Dyer-Witheford and others (Dyer-Witheford and de Peuter, 2009; Kline et al., 2003) analyze ‘digital games as a new media industry on the cutting edge of the globalized, neoliberal workforce transformation, including casualization, outsourcing, and general labor precarity’ (Taylor et al., 2015: 371). In addition, they argue digital games as a media of empire and portray the emergence of a ‘playbor’ (Kücklich, 2005) force therein, game players that provide gaming companies with ‘free labour’ that extended their game’s commercial viability and longevity.

As such, the concept of immaterial labour theory has become a fashionable term to analyze how users’ voluntary participations in the digital culture are exploited by digital conglomerates such as Google (Andrejevic, 2009, 2010; de Peuter, 2015; Ross, 2012; Scholz, 2012; Taylor et al., 2015).

5 NEW FORMS OF POLITICS: NEOLIBERAL SUBJECTIVITIES AND PRECARIITY

While the concept of immaterial labour has developed to explore the changed relation between labour and economic production in digital media industry, the increasing concerns on the underemployed material condition of immaterial labour has also emerged around the concept of ‘precarity’.

5.1 Artist entrepreneur as a neoliberal subject

Many studies on labour in the creative industry have revealed that many workers have a double recognition of themselves, working in a ‘digital sweat shop’ but ‘enjoying’ the work (Lovink and Rossiter, 2007; Ross, 2003, 2009). In this regard, Ross (2008: 34) argues that the ‘artist’ has been rediscovered as the new model worker for managers looking for employees capable of self-discipline under the most extreme job pressure of the creative industry. According to von Osten (2007), the figure of the ‘artist’ (such as artists, musicians, and bohemians) had previously been located outside the mainstream labour force as an exceptional subject of modernity, but it has now become a normal/hegemonic figure in the discourse of ‘creative industries’. Artists are now represented as self-motivated sources of productivity and celebrated as the sole producers of creativity, with innovative life- and work-styles and passionate commitment. In particular, creative artists function as role models and reference figures for ordinary people to follow as entrepreneurs of their own lives. The ‘labour entrepreneurs’ are encouraged to be the artists of their own lives, obliged to be free and urged to be mature, autonomous and responsible for themselves under the requirement or imperative to be ‘creative’. von Osten (2007) claimed that the artist subject is closely integrated in the process of self-precarization. Even though there is little excuse for their failure, the romanticised image of artists enduring a difficult period for the sake of their work still operates in people’s minds. This mythology of the artistic production process is coupled with the image of a metropolitan lifestyle with an illusion of a nomadic life, in which working and living are combined in a more leisurely way. Thus, von Osten argues, ‘neoliberal ideology is fully realised as it acquires an aesthetic dimension’ (2007: n.p.).

Lorey (2006) traces the process of self-precarization in the West back to the social movement in 1960s and 1970s, where various groups of people such as feminists,

ecologists, and the Left wing groups tried to build alternative ways of life against the state, school, and family. Against the normality of 'Fordism', they sought to distinguish themselves from normal living and working conditions and voluntarily accepted underemployment conditions in their attempts to create a balance between work and life. However, these attempts have become utilised by the capital that sought the flexibility of the labour market. Thus, she argues, 'the practices and discourses of social movements in the past thirty or forty years were not only dissident and directed against normalization, but were also simultaneously part of the transformation towards a neo-liberal form of governmentality' (Lorey, 2006: n. p.).

The critiques of creative economy have attempted to break the myth of 'artist subjectivity' by revealing how precarious reality is, arguing that the concept of the 'creative industry' and 'creative labour' contribute to ignoring or conversely, alleviating the precarious employment situations prevalent in the sectors (e.g. Lovink and Rossiter, 2007). In the mid 2000s, such theory began to closely intersect with European currents of analysis and activism revolving around the concept of 'precarity', which was developed in the autonomist tradition (de Peuter, 2011: 418).

5.2 Precarity as a neoliberal ontological condition

The term precarity began to circulate with the issue of the expansion of unstable (or 'flexible') employment accompanied by the wider process of 'modernization' and 'Europeanization' in Italy (Andall, Puwar, and the Italian Group, 2007).³⁵ According to Laura Fantone (2007), in the 1990s, it was used only in a negative sense to identify substitute school teachers in public sector, referring to their lack of the advantage of

³⁵ 'Precarity' is a neologism that translates Italian term *precarieta* (*precarite* in French) into English. *Precarieta* originates in the Latin '*preco-preaece*' which means 'to pray'. It emphasizes that someone in a precarious condition tends to resort to prayer (Andall et al., 2007).

security in their economic life. By the late 1990s, it earned a connotation as a political term in Italy. Following the successes of reclaiming words like, ‘gay’ and ‘queer’, political activists appropriated the term ‘based on a strategic use of political irony and detournement, borrowed from situationism and other politically savvy forms of communication’, commonly circulated with increasing pride (Fantone, 2007: 7). By the time, the term also appeared in mainstream French sociology in an attempt to grasp the convergence of struggles by unemployed and intermittent workers, raising the issue of ‘precarious generation’ (Bourdieu, 1999). In the early of 2000s, being located at the centre of protests, actions, and discussions in Western European nations³⁶, the term emerged ‘as a mobilizing concept for sectors of the European left and has become a stock slogan among antiglobalization activists’ (Ross, 2008: 41). The EuroMayDay protests against precarity began in Milan in 2001 and spread to 18 European cities by 2005 (Neilson and Rossiter, 2008: 53). At its peak, hundreds of thousands of people, mostly young, took to the streets of the cities across continental Europe (Standing, 2011: 2).

In this ‘*precari* movement’, precarity tends to be defined in contrast to classic Fordist employment conditions, including ‘the same job for life, a stable identity rooted on one’s permanent employment, a predictable schedule, a relatively stable income, the performance of repetitive manual labour, and access to “welfare” supports during periods of unemployment’ (Brophy and de Peuter 2007: 180).³⁷ Although these precarious workers have been persistent for the whole history of capitalism, the recent

³⁶ EuroMayDay 2004, Precarity Ping Pong in London 2004, the International Meeting.

³⁷ According to Andall et al. (2007), ‘precarity’ refers to ‘all possible shapes of unsure, not guaranteed, flexible exploitation: from illegalised, seasonal and temporary employment to homework, flex- and temp- work to subcontractors, freelancers or so-called self-employed persons.’ ‘Precarious’ indicates a lack of security and stability that threatens, and produces danger. ‘Precarious labour’ (or ‘*precariats*’) specifically refers to someone performing flexible work who is employed temporarily, mostly in information or service sectors, with non-standard work contracts and schedules, and without social security or benefits (Andall et al., 2007).

departure is the addition of well-paid and high-status workers into this group of 'precarious workers'. As Brophy and de Peuter (2007) point out, what is new is 'not its existence but rather the degree to which it has been generalised' and thus precarious employment should be regarded as a 'continuum'.

For autonomist theorists such as Lazzarato, Hardt and Negri, the shared precariousness is seen, not only as the expansion of exploitation, but also as a point of the birth of new politics. From their view, drawing on the autonomist class composition theory, the emergence of the precariat in a context of politics after 1968 was interpreted as a form of labourers' refusal against work of industrial society: the casualization of employment was in part capital's response to the pressure imposed on their profits by increasing wage struggles; in part a response to the refusals by young people of the generation of 1968 to the sort of work patterns endured by their parents (Brophy and de Peuter: 2007: 180). In this respect, the autonomists see the formation of a multi-class precariat (which is another name for immaterial labour working in precarious working conditions) based on the shared insecurity of all aspects of their lives, thus underlining the possibility of cross-class solidarity (Ross 2008).

By 2006, although the precariat movement itself came into crisis, it has become part of a major political agenda in Europe and has emerged as an object of academic research. Rigorous intellectual debates surrounding the concept of precarity occurred, particularly through online, open access publications such as *Mute*, *Fibreculture Journal*, and *ephemera* (Neilson and Rossiter, 2008: 52-53). Primary concerns over the concept of the precariat as a political subject are surrounding its supposed universalism (e.g. Fantone, 2007; Mitropoulos, 2005; Neilson and Rossiter, 2005, 2008). In the precariat movement, precarity appeared as an exceptional phenomenon set against a Fordist or Keynesian norm, by taking the US and Europe as the assumed background.

However, when considering capitalism in a wider historical and geographical scope, ‘it is precarity that is the norm’ (Neilson and Rossiter, 2008: 54) and ‘Fordist stable employment is an exception in capitalist history’, in operating upon ‘the vast amount of unpaid domestic labour by women and hyper-exploited labour in the colonies’ (Mitropoulos, 2005: n.p.). Neilson and Rossiter (2008: 57) argue that is the reason why the precariat movement expanded only within Western Europe, ‘where the temporal switch between the welfare state and post-Fordist labour regimes was marked’ and it had failed to spread into other geographical sites such as Hong Kong and China, where precarious conditions had been normalised. Within East Asia, the only place where the movement was accepted by the youth was Japan, where the Fordist system was adapted in the 1950s (ibid: 56).

On the other hand, its androcentric tendency is also criticised by feminists. For instance, Fantone (2007) criticises that the precarity movement based in Milan, Spain and Paris emerged only when the western, male worker started to recognise the negative consequences of the new, post-industrial, flexible job market, and supposed a single, male, urban worker as its imaginary political subject:

This subject generally corresponded to a young man living in a northern Italian urban area, employed in the service sector, specifically in chain stores, customer care phone services or large distribution warehouse, and performing repetitive tasks. Such a view was based on a political imaginary subject: the single, male, urban artist or creative worker, idealized as the vanguard of the precariat, juxtaposed with the stereotyped ageing housewife, living in the suburbs, engaged in social production, shopping and taking care of her family. (Fantone 2007: 9)

Later, after considerable discussion about affective and reproductive labour in defining precariousness with other political groups, the Euro Mayday *precari* movement began to include issues concerning not only young male chain-store workers but also female-specific rights, such as paid maternity leave. However the previous idealized imaginary subject still serves as the mainstream image of precarity in Italy (Fantone 2007: 9).

Some extend the meaning of precarity in an attempt to grasp the complexity in the experience and perception of precarity (e.g. Fantone, 2007; Neilson and Rossiter, 2005, 2008; Tsianos and Papadopoulos, 2006). Drawing on Judith Butler's concept of 'precariousness' as human being's ontological vulnerability to external forces (Butler, 2004), Neilson and Rossiter extend the meaning of precarity beyond a position of labour market, as 'an ontological experience and social-economic condition with multiple registers that hold the potential to contribute to a political composition of the common' (2005: n.p.):

The point is not to replace the figure of the creative worker with that of the migrant or female care-worker in the discussions and actions surrounding precarity. Nor is it to collapse these various types of labour practice into a composite category. [...] Precarity, then, does not have its model worker. Neither artist nor migrant, nor hacker nor housewife, there is no precarious Stakhanov. Rather, precarity strays across any number of labour practices, rendering their relations precisely precarious – which is to say, given to no essential connection but perpetually open to temporary and contingent relations. In this sense, precarity is something more than a position in the labour market, since it traverses a spectrum of labour markets and positions within them. [...] (Neilson and Rossiter 2005, n.p.)

Similarly, Tsianos and Papadopoulos (2006), focusing on the expanded vulnerability in life on the level of time, define 'precarity' as a site where the change in the meaning of productivity in post-Fordist societies forces us into exploitation primarily on the level of time:

Precarity is where immaterial production meets the crisis of the social systems, which were based on the national social compromise of normal employment. Because work – in order to become productive – becomes incorporated into non-labour time, the exploitation of the workforce happens beyond the boundaries of work, it is distributed across the whole time and space of life. Precarity means exploiting the continuum of everyday life, not simply the workforce. In this sense, precarity is a form of exploitation which operates primarily on the level of time. (Tsianos and Papadopoulos, 2006: n.p.)

For Tsianos and Papadopoulos, precarity refers to ‘the embodied experience of a restless movement between multiple time axes’ as ‘the existential condition of precarious living labour which is organized on the continuous time of life’ (ibid: n.p.). Thus, they assert that the point of departure of the new social subject should be its materialisation in the subject’s flesh, not immaterial production and urge to explore the embodied experience of precarity, which is characterised by ‘vulnerability (the steady experience of flexibility without any form of protection), hyperactivity (the imperative to accommodate constant availability), simultaneity (the ability to handle at the same time the different tempi and velocities of multiple activities), recombination (the crossings between various networks, social spaces, and available resources), restlessness (being exposed to and trying to cope with the overabundance of communication, cooperation, and interactivity), unsettledness, affective exhaustion, and cunning’ (ibid: n.p.).

In addition, Fantone highlights that precarity is differently experienced by gender and generation even within the same geographical location. According to her, ‘precariousness is a constitutive aspect of many young Italian women’s lives’ and it is ‘a life condition, not just the effect of job market flexibility and not solely negative’ (Fantone, 2007: 5). Fantone (2007) asserts that it is necessary to investigate how precarities in relation to a flexible job market are weaving with precariousness of other less flexible societal structures affecting their lives, such as heterosexual marriage, maternity, and care-work:

Today, it is important to recall how old forms of instability and precarious employment are still present in Italy and have always impacted on the female population. It is important to keep in mind the fundamental presence of older and long-established forms of precariousness. This is especially important in the south, where old precarities intersect with new precarities introduced by flexible work contracts. Simply put, precarity has been a permanent and traditional

feature of life in southern Italy for many generations of women, taking the form of submerged labour with no contract, black markets and illegal economies (where there is no safety or rights), family self-exploitation, characterised by no clear division between work and house chores, and informal hiring practices through familial connections that have no long-term guarantees (Fantone, 2007: 10).

In addition, Fantone points out the generational difference in the perception of precarity. According to her, in Italy, the older two generations living in northern and central Italy, who received stable social status and economic security under a Fordist model of employment, showed a stunning reaction against the ‘new’ forms of precariousness. To them, it means ‘an unexpected loss of their recently acquired middle-class privileges’ (Fantone, 2007: 10-11), while for young generation, precariousness clearly means ‘lack of future prospects’ (ibid: 6).

5.3 Precarious generation in South Korea

Similar to the Italian case, the ‘precarious generation’ debate in South Korea was triggered by the male elites of the older generation who enjoyed a Fordist model of employment in Korea before the Crisis, not by the youth themselves who entered the labour market after the 1997 IMF crisis. In left wing, Park and Woo, who belong to the so called ‘386 generation’,³⁸ initiated the debate with their book, *88 man won generation* (the generation of 88,000 won) in 2007. Following the term ‘1000 euro generation’ in Europe, they labeled the young generation according to their average income (880,000 won), roughly estimated by the authors, arguing that the vast majority of young people eventually would work as temporary workers for their entire lives. The authors urged young people to form collective actions against their working conditions

³⁸ The ‘386 generation’ is a widely used term referring to a generation who were born in the 1960s and went to university in the 1980s when the militant student movement played a leading role in the overall social movements against the military government. Although the term is used to represent the entire generation, it specifically means a group of highly educated elites.

and political solidarity with others, instead of devoting themselves to self-improvement. The book produced a huge, warm response from the 386 generation working in left-wing media and academia, making its exceptional success as an academic book. Young generation's response, however, was quite far from the authors' expectation. Many young people expressed their shock at learning the fact that many of the 386 generation had been able to gain a stable job regardless how low their academic scores were. With the book's success, precarious generation has become one of the most popular research topics in social science. Among others, a book by Rando Kim (2010), a right wing professor of Seoul National University, became another bestseller related to the topic. The main point of his book maintains that young people should be more adventurous and passionate. The book received a notable response, especially from the middle-class parents living in relatively wealthy sectors who accepted it as a guideline of self-improvement for their children.

Even though the two books located in the opposite side in terms of their political stances (the first one attempted to form a political subject against precarity; the second presented a passionate artist entrepreneur), they share several characteristics. Both of them, foremost, share an imaginary subject of young people as highly educated urban young males, who were previously almost guaranteed a stable job. Both of them also advised young people to do what the authors did in their time in university, romanticizing their own generation's experiences based on their own negative perspectives on young people. As such, the precarious generation debate can be said to be a reflection of fear of the parent generation, for whom precarity was an exception, rather than of their children's generation, for whom precarity is an accepted norm. Thus, young people's specific experiences of precarity have hardly been investigated and, as I

already mentioned, women are almost completely absent in the precarious generation debate (See 2 in CH 1).

This thesis seeks to explore the embodied experiences of precarity by underemployed young women in South Korea. Following the extended definition of precarity as a neoliberal ontological condition, it investigates how old forms of precariousness imposed on women ensemble with new forms of precarities given by the introduction of flexible employment system in South Korea. In doing so, this thesis seeks to contribute to understanding not only how precarity could be differently perceived according to the nature of capitalism in a specific national, geographical and historical contexts, but also how it could be unevenly experienced by young women within the same geographical site. In addition, I investigate young women's digital media use, as a form of immaterial labour, 'free labour', which is a particular form of productive activity that produces economic values in digital economy, focusing on the link between their precarious lives and their digital media use.

CHAPTER 4 RESEARCHING THE UNDEREMPLOYED WOMEN

1 INTRODUCTION

This article discusses the ethics in intimate ethnography, drawing on a year-long fieldwork investigating the precarious lives of young women and their use of digital media in Seoul, South Korea. First, I will explain my personal and academic reasons for adopting an ethnographic approach to the research. Second, I will describe how I gained access and built my ‘fields’ with informants and how my research evolved into a multi-sited, intimate ethnography through the process. Third, I will reflect further on the particular forms of intimate ethnography I constructed with my informants and the specific forms of knowledge that it produced. Finally, I will address some ethical issues that I faced doing my fieldwork, the practical strategies that I undertook to ensure that the research complied with the ethical principles related to these issues, and how these significantly shaped the nature of my study.

2 RESEARCHING WOMEN’S EVERYDAY LIFE IN DIGITAL AGE

My interest on gender and digital media started when I was a MA student in Media and communication in 1998. At that time, the myth of the Internet was widely spread as part of a national project towards building a ‘knowledge society’, the rapid transition into a neoliberal economy in South Korea. The Korean government praised the Internet not only as a magical tool for recovering its economy from the financial crisis but also as a democratic tool for the marginalised. Women were especially singled out as winners in this transition. The commercial field celebrated the Internet as a site for women’s media and mainstream feminists also welcomed these positive representations of women.

Confirming Carol Stabile's assertion that intellectuals are not autonomous from larger political, ideological, and economic contexts (Stabile, 2011), Korean academic fields played a major role in the construction of the myth, reproducing optimistic discourses regarding the Internet and women. In particular, the curriculums of Media and Communication were full of debate on the potential of digital media. I too was excited with the discourse of the potential of the Internet for women. The excitement came from my own frustration with the patriarchal structure of Korean society and the media landscape as a feminist who had been actively participating in the university women's movement in the 1990s. Echoing my excitement, in the early period of the Internet in Korea, some groups of young Korean female feminists set up several online feminist webzines as attempts to construct alternative subjectivities as women. Observing these sites, in 1999 I set out to conduct an explorative research as to at which extent the Internet was offering Korean women with an alternative space (Sukjin Chae, 2001). What I found from the research was quite different from what I expected and hoped. The governmental and commercial sites were rapidly dominating 'cyberspace', actively constructing traditional female subjectivities as mothers and consumers. On the other hand, early feminist spaces were under massive attack by men and to avoid these attacks, most of them began to operate as exclusive communities, and as a result, dramatically being marginalised.

The problems and limitations that I realized doing my MA research have greatly influenced the design of my Ph.D. research. One of the fundamental issues was about the relationship between technology and society. Not only the Korean government and popular media but also many feminist studies, including my MA thesis, were (and still are) sharing in a strong assumption of technological determinism, which perceives technology not only as a neutral tool, being distinct from society, but also as a magical

tool which can radically change our lives in a utopian or dystopian manner (Lohan, 2000: 898). Since the 1980s, many attempts to overcome this technological determinism have been made in the field of technology studies (e.g. Bijker, 1995; Latour, 2005; Mackenzie and Wajcman, 1985, 1999; Winner, 1980). Earlier studies, questioning the fundamental nature of technology, asserted that technological change is strongly shaped by society. Later, the question moved on to the society itself, emphasizing that the society itself is shaped through technology, arguing for a mutual impact between society and technology, the so-called ‘sociotechnical change’ (Bijker, 1995). More recently, the dichotomy between technology and society itself has been questioned. In particular, Bruno Latour’s work has led a tendency to bypass the conceptual division between technology and society. Latour asserts a move towards a more anthropological approach by investigating how a technology is born in a network in which human and things (technology) co-construct and how this in turn transforms the network (Latour, 1999, 2005).

These works in technology studies have greatly influenced media studies and feminist studies on technology (e.g. Faulkner, 2001; Lohan, 2000, 2004; Lohan and Faulkner, 2004; Wajcman, 2010). In particular, since the late 1980s, a group of British media scholars such as Roger Silverstone, David Morley, and Shaun Moores have attempted to investigate ‘sociotechnical’ change in the context of everyday life media consumption (Moores, 1993, 2000, 2005, 2012; Morley, 2000; Morley and Silverstone, 1991; Silverstone, 1994, 2006; Silverstone and Hirsch, 1992; Silverstone, Hirsch, and Morley, 1992). In line with Raymond Williams’s work on television (1974), they have attempted to understand how media as a technological artifact is embedded in our everyday life in relation to a wider social context, in Morley’s words, ‘microwaving the macro theory’ (Morley 2000: 4). In addition, by adopting an ethnographic approach,

they have also attempted to move away from the dominant media-centred and representational approach in media studies, arguing explicitly for a ‘non-media-centric’ approach to media studies (See Krajina et al., 2014; Moores, 2005, 2012; Morley, 2009). The early works tended to focus on the domestic sphere, but the later one expanded into various daily experiences in various spaces, including public spaces and online spaces (e.g. Bassett, 2011; Bull, 2000, 2015; Moores, 2012).

To me, the ‘everyday life media study’ was very useful in overcoming another fundamental problem that I felt in doing my MA research. Although I conducted focus group interviews with the organisers of feminist webzines (a group of elite feminist young women), the research largely drew on the analysis of texts registered online, and thus it was a sort of representational approach on the construction of subjectivity online. This was also largely based on my assumption of the division between governmental and commercial sites as subordinate spaces and feminists webzines as resistant spaces, which reflected my own elitist romantic assumption of a third space autonomous from the power of the government and the capital. The ‘everyday life’ approach offered me with a framework to overcome the elitist approach in its use of the everyday as a critical category. Drawing on a French philosopher, Lefebvre, who saw everyday life as not only subordinate but also resistant space revealing the political implications embedded in our daily mundane practices, the early days of media ethnography focused on the complex interplay between biography and history, the personal and the social, and between the local and the global by looking at ‘material culture’ over a sustained period of time. However, despite their painstaking efforts to understand how media uses are embedded in the dynamic and complex interplay between technology, space and actors, their works tend to be interested in how a specific media technology leads to transformations in space (I think, this is partly because most of the scholars’ academic

background is in geography) and thus the particularity of a local culture and people's individual experiences tend to become marginalised. In this aspect, their work remains still media-centred to some extent.

Another body of literature that I referred to was the 'virtual ethnography' in such works as those of Sherry Turkle (1995) and Christine Hine (2000, 2005, 2008). This approach offers the great advantage of allowing us to investigate people's interactions in the 'virtual field' and has produced great interest in media ethnography approaches. Thus, 'ethnographic research' has now become a common tool in Internet studies. However, these 'ethnographic' media studies tend to rely merely on in-depth interviews over a short period of time and most studies thus seem to fail to draw a 'thick description' (Geertz, 1973: 6) of media culture embedded in people's everyday lives. In these studies, 'ethnography' has become a term used for a small-scale qualitative study. In addition, it places the Internet in the centre, so that it looked more like a study of 'Internet users', which is in line with the dominant media-centred approach.

Moving away from the media-centred tendency, I paid more attention on the historical and social context of a particular setting and individuals' experiences. More specifically, I attempted to explore how young Korean women make their ways of life negotiating their underemployment, how media are weaved into their everyday life, and how this interweaving relates to the wider social context.

To do so, I attempted to adopt a more 'traditional' ethnographic approach following media anthropologists such as Daniel Miller, Don Slater, Jo Tacchi, and Lila Abu-Lughod. They argue that media culture should be investigated from broader social contexts (Ginsburg, Abu-Lughod, and Larkin, 2002; Miller, 2006; Slater and Miller, 2000; Tacchi, 1998, 2000, 2003, 2006; Tacchi et al., 2003). Like the early media ethnographers such as Silverstone and Morley, media anthropologists argue that 'an

anthropological and ethnographic approach to ICTs takes us beyond the immediate contexts of access and use to a consideration of how these technologies and their various contents are embedded in quotidian lives' (Tacchi, 2006: n.p.).

Such strategies help us see not only how media are embedded in people's quotidian lives but also how consumers and producers are themselves imbricated in discursive universes, political situations, economic circumstances, national settings, historical moments, and transnational flows, to name only a few relevant contexts (Ginsburg et al., 2002: 2).

In particular, Slater and Miller (2000: 4) criticise Internet studies for starting with concepts such as 'cyberspace' and 'virtuality', which assume a certain division between online and offline by conceptualising the forms of experience online as something isolated from offline reality. They argue that Internet studies should start from 'real life' rather than 'cyberspace'. Following Latour's approach, they suggested studying the complexity of the networks that the Internet is embedded in. In the line with them, Tacchi (2006) emphasises looking at the whole structure of communication and information in people's daily life, instead of focusing on individual media and their impacts. She suggests studying 'communicative ecologies' as an ethnographic approach to ICTs:

We can understand communications as processes that involve a mix of media, organised in specific ways, through which people connect with their social networks. [...] We can understand different communicative ecologies: women and men, and boys and girls, different castes or religions will have different social networks, different access to media, and understand media differently, their communication patterns and needs may differ (Tacchi et al., 2003: 17).

Following Tacchi's advice, I tried to investigate the communicative ecology of young underemployed women and understand their media use as part of wider communication processes in their everyday life. First, since 'people do not use or think about media in isolation from each other' and 'have a mix or repertoire of communications skills and resources' (Tacchi et al., 2003: 15), I planned to look at their 'media mixes or media

repertoires' rather than focus on a specific media. Second, I planned to investigate how media are organised differently in various settings. Media organisation in the work place significantly differs from that at home. Third, I tried to map young underemployed women's social networks: Who do they communicate with, and how? Does a particular medium – like mobile phones or the Internet – fit into their existing social networks? In this way, by investigating their communicative ecology, I wanted to explore their media use as communication processes in their everyday life.

At the same time, I integrated a life story approach into my research as a way of investigating the lives of the marginalised women. Not only early media ethnographers such as Moores used the approach as a way of investigating how the personal lives are interlocked with the historical and social changes, but also many feminists have used it as a way of investigating marginalised women's lives (e.g. Jarrett, 1994; Krumer-Nevo, 2002, 2005). By gathering young women's life stories (especially focusing on their work trajectories), I aimed to explore how the underemployed young women, who are rarely documented, shaped their lives under the impact of rapid neoliberal social changes over the past decade and how their uses of digital media were interlocked with it.

3 CONSTRUCTING THE FIELD

As I described above, when I began to conduct my research, I imagined to conduct a traditional form of ethnography based on a physical field where I conduct participant observation of unemployed young women (*baekjo*). However, in practice, from the beginning, I was faced with two fundamental questions: who is a *baekjo* and where I can find them?

In relation to the first question, while conducting background research, I became very confused with the whole concept of 'the unemployed', referred to as *baeksu* (male)

and *baekjo* (female) in Korea. Who are the *baeksu*/*baekjo*? In the past, the meaning of ‘baeksu’ assumed a certain period of stable employment, which enabled people to distinguish the unemployed from the employed, and to construct their identities based on their occupations. As casual employment spread, however, this distinction between the employed and unemployed has become blurred, and so has people’s identity based on their occupation. Many people are likely to get hired for a short time, moving from one occupation to another with frequent periods of unemployment. In this situation, they form a way of life with frequent shifts in status from employed to unemployed and with a lack of consistency in their jobs. It seems to make it difficult for people to define themselves in terms of their job. For instance, one of my informants was unemployed when I interviewed her for the first time. She was previously a department sales girl, then became an office girl when I next met her. By our third meeting, she was working as a telemarketer. Seeing this, I had to extend the concept of *baeksu/baekjo* to cover all young people who were making their life outside of stable employment, that is the underemployed. In fact, by the mid-2000s, the term, *baeksu* began to capture a very broad category of people in underemployment. Under the crisis of employment, all young people can be *baeksu* even though their experience of unemployment may be quite different according to their cultural/social/economic capital. In this respect, the unemployed are in a Foucaultian way defined by the employed. Conducting my research, I found the term out of use and it was difficult to find anyone who actually considered themselves as *baekjo* or *baeksu*.

At the same time, while gathering published materials and documents on this subject, I narrowed the scope of informants to ‘ordinary’ *baeksu* who have a relative lack of cultural, social, and economic capital. By exploring the ‘ordinary’ *baeksu*, I attempted to go beyond the binary representation of the young unemployed as between

those who are frustrated in an extreme crisis and those who are enjoying a cosmopolitan way of life.

The second fundamental problem was where to find a 'field' to conduct my 'traditional' ethnographic research. Although I wished to start from a 'real' field, there is no such site that could be called a 'field' in the sense of traditional anthropology since *baekjo* is not a population that lives together within a limited area. Traditionally, 'the field' used to be bounded in one single 'geographical field', where 'people' to be studied live together. However, in contemporary society, people are constantly moving not only geographically but also virtually through the media so that the boundary between cultures becomes more and more ambiguous (Clifford, 1997; Okely, 2003). Furthermore, as the proliferation of digital media expands the social spaces where people interact, their experiences become more and more media-situated. In this situation, current ethnography has become more and more 'multi-sited' (Marcus, 1995). As the people that I wanted to investigate were scattered, my research was also conducted at various sites, following the ways and places in which the unemployed interact. In fact, my research itself was an event constructing a field, where I could observe the interaction of my informants.

In this context, Hastrup (2005) argues that in contemporary society, 'fieldwork is no longer seen as a matter of mapping social systems and clarifying their nature but rather as a matter of engaging and radically interpreting lived social worlds' (ibid: 138). Her definition of fieldwork is based on her definition of the social as a performed space. Comparing the social to a theatre, she argues that individual action is firmly based on a sense of a whole society. Like actors playing a meaningful action with a sense of the plot in a theatre, she argues, individuals' action is always partly based on an 'illusion of a whole,' which is their perception of the social. This illusion of a whole is already in

place (although fluid and under re-construction), but it becomes ‘real’ only through individuals’ action based on it (Hastrup, 2004). Following Hastrup, by the term ‘field’, I mean ‘the social’ as a performed space where informants interact. Through ‘fieldwork’, I expected to observe the interactions between young women’s perception of the social and their practices.

During a year of ethnographic fieldwork in South Korea (from July 2007 to July 2008), I tried to access young underemployed women based on diverse ‘fields’, using multi-methods such as observation, participant observation, in-depth interviews, and group interviews. Face to face interviews were conducted with 30 underemployed young women from diverse social and educational backgrounds and within a different position in the labour market. I also talked to over 20 people around them including underemployed men, their friends, and co-workers (See Appendix).

Although my research was conducted in various fields weaving the ‘virtual’ and the ‘real’, they can be largely divided into three, according to the kinds of people I interacted with, the way in which I constructed the field, and the nature of the fields themselves. In the next section, I explain how these three fields were created in the midst of interaction with informants and how the research evolved according to the needs and difficulties that I faced in these fields.

The first field: Baeksu Hall and Hope Hall

Out of a year fieldwork, I spent 6 months around an online and offline centre for the young unemployed. As I mentioned above, since the underemployed young people are not a population who live together in a bounded geographical site, I utilized the Internet as a contact zone and a ‘virtual field’, where I could get a broader sense of the life of the underemployed and observe their interactions. In *Daum*, one of the most popular portal

sites for online communities in South Korea, using *baeksu* as a keyword, I found five active communities of *baeksu*, and among them I chose *Baeksu Hall* as my starting point of the research for several reasons. First, as the oldest baeksu community (opened in 2004) among them, it had a large number of members (more than 14000 members in 2007). I expected to see various baeksus with different social/cultural/economic backgrounds in the community. Second, it had rich data of online diaries written by the members, which describes their everyday life (e.g. difficulties in getting a job, precarious work conditions, and troubles with family). Since the data that I wanted to gather was already registered online, I expected to find and access proper informants reading the online diary. Third, most importantly, as the founder of the online community was working as a head of an offline centre for unemployed young people, it was closely connected with an offline centre for unemployed young people (Hope Hall), which was operated by an NGO. I expected that this would provide me with a chance to observe how interactions in a virtual field and material field were interwoven.

However, most of my expectations were wrong. After two months of online observation, I found that the habitants of the online community were quite homogeneously less educated and poor. To my surprise, it was not uncommon to see a posting that expressed an extreme level of depression or mentioned suicide. In these situations, many people seemed to withdraw to home, and rarely attended an activity of the offline centre. During the several months' fieldwork in the centre, I was able to recruit only one female informant, Eunjung (not her real name, 24), who was one of the active volunteers at the centre. I attempted to recruit other women through her in vein. Because Eunjung had an extreme level of home withdrawal after being bullied in her middle school, she did not have any close friends that she kept in touch with. In addition, according to her, people whom she had recently become friends with were also mostly

keeping themselves at home and thus, she thought they would not come out of their homes for an interview.

As such, it was very difficult to conduct a face-to-face interview with an inhabitant of the community because they were forming a way of life with an extreme level of social withdrawal (e.g. during six-month field work in the centre, I was able to attend only one offline meeting). Particularly, women were more reluctant than men to come out to the centre because of the macho culture of the centre.

Faced with this situation, I organised a group meeting exclusively for women, drawing on some feminist and postmodern works on marginalized women which recommend group interviews as a way of listening to them and learning from them (e.g. Fontana and Fry, 2003; Madriz, 1998, 2003). For instance, Madriz (2003: 363-368) asserts several advantages of group interviews: it helps foremost to access participants who may find face to face individual interaction scary or intimidating by providing a comfortable environment where they can share ideas, beliefs, and attitudes with people from the same socioeconomic, ethnic, and gender backgrounds. In addition, these multiple lines of communication help to minimize the researcher's control and serve to overcome the unbalanced relations between the researcher and the researched. Finally, the collective nature of the group interview, which serves to 'share women's everyday experiences of subjugation and their individual and collective survival and resistance strategies', empowers the participants and validates their voices and experiences (2003: 364).

Expecting to have these advantages in my research, I operated a group meeting once a week for six weeks. However, the real process was far from my expectations. Foremost, organizing and maintaining the group meeting was the biggest challenge. I advertised the meeting on the online community and 6 women applied to attend the

meeting. Only two out of six appeared in the first meeting, and in total only three women participated in the meeting. Late arrivals and no shows without any notice were common throughout the whole process of the meeting. In her study with lower income women, Madriz (1998) also mentions the difficulty of gaining participation as the most serious problem in maintaining the group meetings. Madriz (1998: 120-121) attributes her informants' common no shows and late arrivals to their vulnerability in family life. Given a traditional role, the poorer Latino women Madriz conducted her study with are more exclusively responsible for the care of the children and the house. They should be available to their partners and children, which puts more unexpected demands on their time and less control over their schedules than to other women. It makes it difficult for them to attend activities outside of the house. The informants that I met through the group meeting were in common with Madriz's informants in that they were very poor, but my informants were all single in their early 20s who did not have a particular responsibility for the care of children or a husband. What barred them from attending activities outside of the house seemed to be the fear of people that all the informants shared. Surprisingly, all of the three women experienced severe bullying in their school, which led them to keep themselves at home for a couple of years. Also, the precariousness they experience as high school graduates in search of a job was embodied as a sense of fear of people, forming a way of life with an extreme level of social withdrawal, which made it difficult for them to attend an activity outside of the house.

In addition, although as Madriz said, the group interview itself offered me a great opportunity to see the interaction between the participants, what I observed in the group meetings was far from mutual empowerment among the marginalised. In my case, participants wanted to get advice from me rather than to share their experiences with

each other. One of them even ignored other participants and acted as if there were no one else except her and I. They seemed to feel too embarrassed about themselves to share their experiences with others, and wanted to distinguish themselves from others rather than identify themselves with others as a group. Thus, it was through an individual interview that I was able to listen to their life stories (interestingly, the punctuality problem dramatically reduced when I met them individually).³⁹

The more I understood their lives, the more I felt responsible for them. I began to become more and more involved with organizations for the isolated young women. I was getting lost from what I originally planned to explore. I pondered if I should change my research subject, but I was not sure if I could endure any of it more, owing to my own depression (a topic of discussion later in the article). Therefore, I decided to leave the Hope Hall field after half a year, feeling much guilt and being depressed.

The second field: social gatherings

Around the time I left Hope Hall, I felt my research had come to a dead end. Although I expected to be able to recruit other informants through the women that I met in the first field, ‘snowballing’, the chain referral sampling technique (Biernacki and Waldorf, 1981), never worked, due to the characteristics of the informants who were living such isolated lives. On the other hand, it was also very difficult to recruit informants through the online community. Through the six months fieldwork period, I succeeded in interviewing only one woman through the online community, except the three women that I met through the focus group. In addition, I felt that my research with the women in the focus group reached a ‘saturation point’, where ‘the data collection stops

³⁹ Due to the very fragment life/work trajectories, it took a lot of time for me to get a sense of their life. Out of three women, one stopped attending the meetings after the first meeting because she felt too afraid to use a public transportation (She had a fear of being attacked by people in public sphere). With the other two informants, I conducted individual interviews 7 -8 times through the one-year fieldwork.

revealing new things and the evidence starts to repeat itself' (Deacon, Pickering, Golding, and Murdock, 1999: 43) and when life story researchers recommend to 'look for a different group to interview' (Thompson, 2004: 82).

Thus, I began to search for another field, through both online and offline connections. As with the first field, I searched for another online space where many young unemployed women gather. However, I became more and more hesitant to approach people by using their online data, not only due to its inefficiency, but also for ethical issues (more discussion on ethical issues related to online data will follow). In a world bombarded by spam, people were very suspicious when contacted by a stranger online. In particular, in the beginning of 2008, in the middle of my fieldwork, a large scale hacking incident resulted in one out of four Koreans having their personal data, including their real name, citizenship number, mobile number and residential address stolen (*Kyunghyang*, 2008). The number of cases of spam mail or voice-phishing significantly increased. The more cyber-frauds, the more anxious and suspicious people became about online contact. In this situation, it was very difficult to contact people online. I also became very cautious of approaching people by using people's online data. Therefore, my research became largely dependent on my personal network. The second field refers to interactions built mainly on offline connections.

As a starting point, I interviewed several young people in my personal network who were underemployed: my university seniors and my friend's brother, most of whom were highly educated. (In fact, most of people around me were underemployed including me). The interviews with them had a form of informal conversation, through which we shared our own difficulties in relation to work and life. The conversations with them were invaluable but I did not use them as main informants to my research because our close relationship seemed to bar me to properly interview them and impede

them to narrate their own life history. Since we were in a same circle, so many things were just taken for granted. For that reason, I began to avoid going around in my intimate circle. However, they took an invaluable role as initial contacts for the second field. Being asked if they knew young women who were *baekjo* or *alba* (part-timers), they introduced to me their close friends who were underemployed. In this way, I gained five informants. Some of them were less educated and others were highly educated. All of them were in much better situations than those of Hope Hall.

Researching the lives of these rather different groups of young women was much more effective than my first round of fieldwork. The personal recommendations of the initial contacts enabled me to research into very closed or informal social groups. Most of all, it was far easier to build a relationship of trust. The introduction by their friend provided for a very confidential atmosphere and enabled me to be accepted as if I were one of their friends. Some of my acquaintances even accompanied me when they introduced me to their friends, creating a setting where they interacted naturally with their friends. They appeared far less hopeless than those in the first field because they had friends to come along with and had enough communicative ability to work and make social relations.

The face-to-face individual interviews were conducted in a form of social gathering, having a dinner and a drink, sometimes accompanied with their close friend. It began in a form of formal interview focused on their work and life trajectory, followed by a more informal conversation about their concerns and wishes in everyday life. With some of them, I maintained a relationship over a lengthy period of several years after the fieldwork in Seoul, thus extending my fieldwork periods and allowing me to conduct the follow-up online interviews and observations. In this way, individual interviews were conducted several times with each of them, both online and offline.

I expected to get more informants through the snowballing method, but it did not work either with those women because they also hardly met other friends. Only one woman introduced her friend to me. Thus, I attempted to access more informants in a public place and through another online community, and made individual interviews with two women, but the relationship with those women did not last after the first individual interview.

The third field: The 2008 candlelight rally

To some extent, the informants that I met in the first and second fields were commonly forming a very isolated life in their attempt to become a ‘normal being’ in Korean society. My life also had a similar pattern. In the middle of doing my research in the second field, I was asked by one of my informants of the first field to attend a candlelight rally against the US beef.⁴⁰ Since the informant had not been interested in political issues and hardly attended a public event, I was very surprised to see her actively inviting and persuading others to join the rally using an online messenger. Following her lead, I began to attend the rally in early May, which was the very early stage of the rally, and it became the third field of my research. I thought the rally would offer me with an exceptional opportunity to observe a rather different form of life with a sense of solidarity and empowerment.

Actively attending the rally for two months (from mid May to mid July) as one of the demonstrators as well as a researcher, I observed how the rally evolved and encountered various female participants. Among them, a group of young women who came from an exclusive online women’s community became my main informants in this field. Participating in several rallies with two of these women, I observed how this

⁴⁰ A large scale of anti-government movement occurred at the end of April 2008 and a series of candlelight rallies lasted for more than three months at the central Seoul (See CH 8).

online community attended the rallies, facilitated by their digital media. In order to protect the members who were attending, people who were in front of their computers ('online') at home or at their workplace continued texting people on the street ('offline') in order to inform them about what was happening and where clashes between the police and protestors were occurring. In fact, the rally itself looked like an online game in the 'real' field. People devised instructions online on where to go using information from the Internet. People offline tended to follow their directions because they could not gather enough information by themselves. Since the group of women I was with did not know the small alleys of central Seoul, I took on the role of a guide. Participating in several rallies, we were confronted with dangerous moments on the street, and the experiences enhanced our sense of community.

In addition, since the field of the rally was constructed through a close interaction between online and offline, I also observed interactions online in several 'virtual' fields. In fact, I had been in the field all day long like other participants. I participated in the rally after work and stayed there until midnight (all night at the weekend rally). As soon as I returned home, I watched live webcasting (the rally was webcast live by participants who were attending the rally) and read updated postings on an online bulletin board. Many online communities sprang up in relation to the rallies. Through one of them, I got to contact with two high school girls who were playing an active role in the rallies. I attended some rallies with them, and in the process they became my informants.

4 ETHICS IN INTIMATE VIRTUAL ETHNOGRAPHY

Ethnography is a co-production by the researcher and the researched. I constructed specific forms of ethnography with my informants within the three fields outlined above, which produced specific forms of knowledge. As Norman points out (2000: 123), the

self of the researcher is crucial not only for the choice of field but also for his/her fieldwork practice. The characteristics of the relationship between the researcher and the researched significantly contribute to shaping a specific form of knowledge in the field (Dicks, Mason, Coffey, and Atkinson, 2005: 32). Lifting the veil of objectivity covering the scientific method, since the late 1990s, the feminist, existential, and postmodern research traditions paid attention on how researchers' sexual, loving, or emotional immersion in the field affected the process of the research. Gaining intimacy with their subjects has been even recommended as a way of overcoming concerns of inequality and power between researcher and researched as well as gaining 'authenticity' of the relationship. The nature of relations between the researcher and the researched has now become a central topic of investigation (Irwin, 2006: 155-156). This section reflects how my own personal experiences have resonated with the experiences of informants and produced specific forms of involvement and intervention in their lives and thus shaped the ethnography.

Intimate ethnography at home

'Coming home!'

That is what I felt when I was about to leave the UK to Seoul, South Korea for my fieldwork. I was a Korean single woman who had lived in South Korea for more than 30 years before I came to the UK for taking a doctoral course in 2006. Spending only one year in the UK, I returned to South Korea for the fieldwork. Therefore, to me, doing ethnography was far from its traditional meaning, which is to go to 'exotic' areas, study what there is, and come back 'home' to write it down (Wittel, 2000). In my case, reversely, the field was my 'home' and my school in the UK where I would report the fieldwork was an 'exotic' place.

As Hastrup (1993: 151) said, “‘home’ is a conceptual category with shifting references’. In this sense, I refer to *Seoul* as ‘home’ more precisely as an emotional place where people feel they belong to as well as a geographical area. The sense of belonging means to know how to behave properly and interact with others, and therefore, there is no need to be nervous at home. Knowing the rules is closely related to having a sense of security. For instance, the reason I felt like a ‘stranger’ in the UK was largely because I was not sure whether my behaviour was appropriate or not and how to properly communicate with others, rather than because of my different skin colour or my geographical displacement. In addition to my limited English, I was not sure how to properly respond to others. This made me very nervous in every aspect of daily life in the school, at cafés, on the bus, and so on. To me, talking to my friends in South Korea through the Internet was like bringing home to my room in the UK and with it, a special sense of security. In this respect, home is a social space where we know how to behave and communicate with others. Therefore, I thought *Seoul* was my home in many respects, where at least I did not need to learn language and social rules in order to be able to communicate with others.

Doing ethnography at home has several advantages. Wulff (2000: 149) compares her fieldwork in the ballet world to ‘coming back home’. Her experiences as a classical ballet dancer not only gave her significant background knowledge to understand the ballet world but also, through a network of old friends, played a pivotal role in getting access to the closed world of ballet. This insider position of ethnographers has been highly evaluated by ‘native’ and ‘feminist’ ethnographers because they believe it helps to overcome the problem of representing ‘exotic others’. For some researchers, moreover, doing fieldwork at home makes it practically and economically easy to come and go to the field, and therefore enables fieldwork over a

long period of time (Norman, 2000: 122). I had expected all these advantages when I planned my research. I made money for my fieldwork research teaching at a university and lived with one of my friends in the central area of Seoul and so my 'fields' were all less than an hour away.

The worlds that my informants showed, however, were very different from the world that I have experienced in Seoul. Among my informants, I often felt a stranger in *Seoul*. In her study with refugees living in Sweden, Norman (2000) describes how she felt such strong and contradictory feelings of closeness and estrangement with the refugees due to her own experiences as a person who is a citizen of Sweden but who had spent her childhood in different countries following her parents. I too felt similarly strong and contradictory feelings, especially with the less educated poor women in Hope Hall (the first field) who had experienced school bullying and severe depression. The feelings they evoked in me bore traces of my childhood experience. As a youngster, I had been left alone with my sick father who suffered from depression. I still do not understand what made him so sad, but remember him weeping inconsolably holding me in his arms. With the burden of taking care of him at the age of ten, I often felt helpless. Identifying myself with them, I often found myself overwhelmed by unexpected feelings of anger, fear, and anxiety. On the other hand, those feelings made me feel a lot of responsibility for them. I felt as if I should protect them from the outer world, which also led me to play the role of teacher in relation to them.

My position as a teacher was also formed by the informants. Although I wanted to build a more equal relationship in a form of friendship, they wanted me to become an advisor who offers advice on how to survive rather than a friend or an investigator. One asked me to introduce her to a job, another asked me to teach her how to put on make up, how to speak, and how to dress; the other asked me whether she should go to

university or not. I failed to provide a clear answer for any of these questions. I felt like I had become a host of a reality TV programme. I was not a counsellor, but I had to take this role on for them. As a result, a rather hierarchical relationship between them and me was formed, putting me in an over-powered position. I felt very uncomfortable with the position, but considering the Korean culture where hierarchies according to age and education level are common, it can also be seen as natural (I was more than ten years older than the women in the first field).

To some extent, this kind of relationship continued with the rest of the informants that I encountered in the second and third field. Introduced by their close friends, I was commonly called as an '*eonni*' (older sister) and accepted as a mentor. In retrospect, my status as a PhD student from a UK university enhanced my position as a mentor with the informants. I was accepted as a highly educated, single woman who succeeded to 'escape' from South Korea. In particular, women that I encountered in the second field were very interested in studying, working and living abroad. They wanted to listen to my experience in the UK and seemed to think of me as a kind of a role model. The fact that I belonged to a UK university also functioned as a big advantage in accessing the women in the third field, the 2008 candlelight rally, where I was called an 'English sister'. I was accepted as someone who did not belong to any interest group in Korea and thus could be trusted. The mentor role helped me maintain a longer-term relationship and follow up with their lives.

Developing friendships in the field raised some ethical issues in relation to ethnography. The interpretive, feminist, and postmodern traditions have argued that intimate methods can be 'more accurate, less exploitative, and less colonizing than objective and distant methods' (Irwin, 2006: 159). However, many field researchers using the intimate methods have found the insider position emotionally and existentially

uncomfortable, forming a feeling of self-doubt and guilt in observing, recording, and analysing people who trust them (Berger, 2001; Ferrell and Hamm, 1998; Irwin, 2006). Similarly, using the intimacy that I built up with informants as the most important ‘investigative tool’ to gather rich data about their personal experiences, I felt guilty ‘playing the double role of researcher and friend’ (Berger, 2001). Like a spy, even during the informal conversations with my informants, I consciously tried to record and analyse these interactions to figure out how it could connect with my research. At the same time, I felt as if I was betraying the ‘authenticity’ of the friendship and exploiting them using their friendships and trusts. To reduce these feelings, I often reminded them that I was researching their lives and that our relationship was not a pure friendship, asking whether I could use our conversations for the research during our informal interactions. In addition, in order to build a reciprocal relationship, I tried to do favours asked by them where I could. In the process, I tried to offer an honest picture of myself to all of my informants. This was also a time that my informants and I shared the precariousness that we had experienced as single women and worked out a strategy to reduce the precariousness in our lives.

Ethics in digital ethnography

The ethical problems inherent in an intimate ethnography become more serious in the interactions using digital media. Although I do not see virtual spaces as something separate from real spaces, researching online requires a distinctive set of ethical concerns, specifically in relation to collecting data as Sveningsson points out:

[T]he Internet makes it possible for us to collect data without being noticed. It is easy for researchers to gather and store material, not only from public documents, such as Webzines and the Web pages of organizations, but we can also document conversations and discussions between private persons without their knowing it, for example, in chat

rooms and newsgroups. [.....] This new opportunity evokes new questions of research ethics in relation to the privacy of the researched. The chance of becoming a 'lurker' has increased compared to researching offline (Sveningsson, 2004: 47).

Since the interactions mediated by digital media were the main research fields, how to deal with the data registered and created in those virtual fields was a critical ethical issue that I faced (for more detailed discussions about virtual ethnography, see Boellstorff, Nardi, and Pearce, 2012; Gatson, 2011; Hine, 2008).

Building and maintaining the intimate relationship with my informants was heavily dependent on the use of digital media (e.g. mobile phones, online messengers, personal homepages, blogs, etc.), following the way in which my informants communicated with others. These interactions also gave me a chance to observe how the informants were using a mixed set of media in their daily life, forming different rules, values, and time perceptions, which seemed to cause substantial tension between the older and younger generations.⁴¹ In addition, allowing me to continue keeping in touch with them even after the fieldwork period in South Korea, digital media significantly expanded the length of the fieldwork period. Through the messenger, email, and blog, the interactions with some informants continued no matter where we were.

However, the problem was that to what extent I could use the materials that I gained through these virtual interactions. The virtual fields mediated by digital media such as blogs and personal-homepages were very personal spaces, and I gained permission when I conducted face-to-face interviews with my informants. After face-to-face interviews, most of them invited me to become an online buddy for their blog, homepage, or online messenger, while some refused to let me know their personal

⁴¹ For example, my informants tended to prefer texting to calling. For them, it seemed a way not only to save money but also to gain more control in relations. While calling requires them to answer on the spot, texting provides more options to respond. They could just ignore a text. Thus, I used texting on purpose in order to give them more space, considering my privileged position as a senior.

online spaces. In particular, being an ‘online messenger buddy’ enabled us to spontaneously contact each other. Since most interactions online were conducted in a form of socialising as a friend, it was hard to draw a line between researching and socialising. For example, I visited my informants’ online spaces to say ‘hi’ and some of them came to my online spaces to do the same. In this situation, it became very unclear to what extent I could use the contents and interactions online with them for my research even though I gained permission to access their online spaces for the research in advance.

I attempted to comply with ethical principles by applying a different level of ethical standards according to the nature of the place and the issues involved. When I looked at several public sites such as online communities of the unemployed and job search sites, I did not expose my presence to members of the community. For instance, in the online community, Baeksu Hall, I took on the role of a ‘lurker’, observing interactions on the message board without revealing my presence or intentions. The inhabitants of the community were anonymously using the space and seemed to well recognise that ‘outsiders’ like journalists were regularly visiting the site and the information they register could be read by anyone.

In contrast, the materials in personal online spaces seemed to require a much higher ethical principle. Some informants were operating their online space exclusively, allowing only very close friends to access it. Some were exposing extremely private contents (for instance, a picture of her and her boyfriend in a bed at a motel). To protect informants’ privacy, I avoided using online material from their private spaces in the end. Thus, my thesis, the written account of the ethnography, has come to be largely based only on face-to-face interactions (‘real fields’), even though it was deeply informed by what I read and saw online (‘virtual fields’).

5 MAKING A PROPER DISTANCE

In 'Writing against Culture'(1991), Lila Abu-Lughod suggests writing of 'ethnographies of the particular' as a way to counter the potentially othering effect of the concept of culture. So far, I have reflected how I investigated the particular ways of lives of the particular groups of the underemployed women in South Korea and how the research became a form of intimate ethnography.

The methodology that I adopted in the study has revealed some limitations and strengths in the process of the research. At first, I designed the research to adopt a more traditional ethnographic research mainly based participant observation in 'real fields'. However, the traditional concept of ethnography, in which the researcher investigates people in a geographical site where they live together, did not fit well with the nature of my informants because they did not live together at a physical place. In this situation, snowballing sampling was adopted for practical reasons and my research came to take a form of intimate ethnography, where I accessed intimate spaces through intimate relationships (specifically, their friendship). This was also a theoretical sampling method whose aim is not to look for typical cases but to seek out 'respondents who are most likely to add theoretical development by extending and even confronting emerging hypotheses.' (Deacon et al., 1999: 52). In retrospect, considering the isolated ways of life of the women in the research, it seems to me almost the only way to access these women in the study. However, this approach had serious limitations in recruiting informants because a snow balling sampling did not work. To make up this limitation, I continued to attempt to access underemployed young women where they were likely to gather such as at a public library, but it was difficult to access them as a stranger. Participant observation in those intimate spaces and public spaces was crucial for me to get a sense that I knew them. However, it was not sufficient. The most valuable data

used in the thesis were gathered through individual interviews in the life story approach. The method provided the research with many advantages. First, I found the life story approach extremely useful to gather a rich descriptive and interpretive account of the lives of the marginalised women and their sense of the social and themselves. In addition, since it commonly took a form of a social gathering of close friends, it provided me with a natural setting to observe their interactions with close friends. Furthermore, interviewing mutual friends allowed me to do a kind of ‘triangulation’, by gathering ‘the accounts of different participants in the setting’ (Morley and Silverstone, 1991: 157). One more thing to be noted is that the moving between online and offline was an essential method to understand how being networked contributes to living a precarious life and offers ways of transcending or making another kind of life.

In the everyday lives of 30 young women that I talked to, the extent and nature of underemployment varies according to their age and educational background corresponding to the possible options given to them in the Korean labour market. Nonetheless, all of them shared the continuing precarity that have imposed on women in Korea even if some of them belong to a different social class. In particular, given the continuing position of young women as temporary labour, they shared gender discrimination, including a great degree of sexual harassment, and lack of prospect in the labour market. In an attempt to reduce these precarity, they pursued to achieve a better qualification that they believe lead them to a better job, forming a very isolated life with very limited social relations. Thus, I had to access them through their limited social relations and came to be a form of intimate ethnography. Although developing intimate relationships with informants was encouraged as a less exploitative and less colonizing way of research, to me, it also seems to be a risky method that can be harmful to both the researcher and the researched. Making an intimate relationship with

someone accompanies a lot of responsibilities. After the fieldwork, I failed to maintain such an intimate relationship with informants that I implied researching them and to be enough responsible for the relationship with them, which gave me a feeling of guilt. In retrospect, it seems to be impossible to achieve. In this sense, the friendship that I pursued to develop can be used to justify the exploitation of informants under the title of friendship. I also attempted to identify myself with informants as a way of reducing the distance between informants and me, but it turned out to have more harms than benefits. For instance, my strong attachment and identification with the informants in the first field made me suffer from fear of people, which had barred me from maintaining a social life for several years. Thus, making a proper distance in the relationships with informants should be carefully considered to respect both the researched and the researchers.

CHAPTER 5 HOPE HALL

1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter explores how a group of less educated young women negotiated their underemployment and their sense of engagement with culture and their use of digital media mediated that. To look at it, I spent six months from August 2007 to January 2008, talking to people who all were hanging around a set of places for the young unemployed: Baeksu Hall and Hope Hall (the first field, See 3 in CH 4). Baeksu Hall is an online community of unemployed young people, which was opened by an unemployed man; Hope Hall is an offline centre for unemployed young people, which was organised by a NGO. When I was undertaking the research, the two places were closely connected with each other as the founder of Baeksu Hall was being employed as the head of Hope Hall. The methods that I engaged in the research were participant observations, informal conversations, individual interviews and focus groups (See CH 4). More specifically, in the online community, I conducted a two-month online observation, gathering a number of online diaries of the residents. In the centre, I did participant observation, attending several activities, talking to people working for or hanging around the centre, interviewing some volunteers individually, and organizing a focus group.

Three women in the chapter were all high school graduates from poor families in their early 20s living in the central part of South Korea. In several aspects, they could be defined as one of the most disadvantaged groups in relation to employment in Korea. In terms of education, high school graduates are relatively less educated groups. Since the middle of the 2000s, more than 80 % of high school graduates advanced to the higher education. In 2008, when I undertook the research, the ratio of those was 83.8% In

addition, among young women, high school graduates shows the lowest employment rate. In 2011, among female aged 21-23, the employment rate of high school graduates was only 34.9% while that of college graduates was 73.7% (Keum, 2011). Echoing those statistics, all three women that I met were also having extreme difficulties in relation to employment, sensing themselves as ‘abnormal beings’ in the society.

The women I talked to had commonly experienced severe bullying in school and extreme social withdrawal for extended periods, and they were trying to recover from their depression using digital media. This paper interprets their extreme social withdrawal as affect, ‘the body’s active presence to the intensities of the present’ (Berlant, 2008: 846), formed in their attempt to reduce the precariousness in their life, not as a ‘mental problem’ caused by their individual and personal characteristics.

This chapter consists of three parts. The next section describes my sense of the field where I undertook the research (Baeksu Hall/ Hope Hall). Then, I provide a more detailed explanation of how I accessed three women in the places and investigated their ways of life. The third section details the life stories of three women, focusing on their work trajectories and its relation to their daily use of digital media. In this way, this chapter will set out to show how digital media are articulated within the precarious life of these women who lack both social safety network by the state and personal safety network within a family.

2 BAEKSU HALL AND HOPE HALL

2.1 Baeksu Hall/ Hope Hall

Going through a dark period isolating myself from the outer world in the early period of my *baeksu* life, I decided to live a more lively and pleasant life as *baeksu* by experiencing ‘cultural things’ in my free time. Baeksu Hall will provide people with various ‘culture programmes’

as well as programmes for jobs in order to enhance young *baeksus* cultural sensibility and thus produce creative human resources for the 21st century. (joo-joo in Baeksu Diary March 05 2004, my translation)

Baeksu Hall ('Baeksu Hoeguan') is an online café where young people share their difficulties in relation to their underemployment (cafe.daum.net/backsuhall). As the opener of the café, Joo-joo (male in his late 30s), said like the above, the community aimed to help unemployed people invent a 'new' way of life as cheerful cultural *baeksu*, escaping from a depressed life.

I chose Baeksu Hall to study for several reasons. First, as the oldest '*baeksu* community' (opened in 2004), it has the largest population (more than 14000 in 2008) among other online *baeksu* communities in *Daum*. In addition, it has rich data online that reveals the everyday lives of *baeksu* written by the unemployed themselves. In '*baeksu* diary', there were more than 2300 postings written by *baeksu* themselves since 2004, telling us of their suffering in precarious workplaces, difficulties in getting a job, troubles with families, and what emotions arose from those experiences. More importantly, it was closely connected to an offline centre for unemployed young people, Hope Hall. What I had expected was that through Baeksu Hall and Hope Hall, I could observe various underemployed people inventing a 'new' way of life doing 'cultural things', gaining a more complex sense of relations between online and offline activities.

However, what I found from two months online observations was far different from what I had expected. In spite of its vast population, the inhabitants of Baeksu Hall seemed to be a quite homogeneous group of people who were relatively less educated and economically disadvantaged. Furthermore, the daily life of the ordinary inhabitants seemed far different from that of 'cultural *baeksu*' as an online diary described the below:

ID: rich businessman Number: 164 Jan 25 2005

My day

6.00am get up
 6.30am jogging to vitalize the day
 7.30am breakfast with 'well-being' (nourishing) food
 8.00am reading books, listening to classical music
 11.00am web surfing for information
 12.30pm lunch in a restaurant
 2.00pm working out in a gym
 5.00pm attending meetings to socialize with people
 6.45pm dinner with family at home
 7.30pm drawing for developing my aesthetic sense
 9.00pm meditation
 10.30pm sleeping after a bath

I wish I were... but in reality,

11.00am get up
 12.00pm eat and play
 5.00pm continue playing
 11.00pm keep continuing playing
 5.00am tired of playing to sleep

Enjoying 'cultural events' such as movies, museums, or art exhibitions seemed to be one of the major rituals to transform themselves from 'depressed *baeksu*' into a pleasant 'cultural *baeksu*'. However, becoming a 'cultural *baeksu*' requires money – for instance to enjoy 'cultural events', which are not available for the most unemployed with no paid work. Rather, the main things that people were talking about in the online community were their extreme sufferings in relation to their unemployment and poverty. It was not uncommon to see a post with someone considering suicide, frustrated with repeated failures in maintaining and getting a job. For many people in Baeksu Hall, unemployment seemed directly accompanied with severe depression.

After two months online observation in Baeksu Hall, I visited Hope Hall to meet the residents of Baeksu Hall face to face. The centre is located on the second floor of an NGO building in central Seoul. The space consists four areas: an activity place, an office for operators, a small group meeting room, and a counselling room. On my first

visit, there was no one in the centre. Thus, I emailed the head of the centre, joo-joo. Introducing myself as a researcher interested in unemployed young people, I asked if I could observe some activities at the centre. Joo-joo invited me to join the meeting of volunteers of Hope Hall the next day. From then on, I did participant observation in Hope Hall for six months, attending several meetings and interviewing people who spent time there.

Figure 1 New Job Board in Hope Hall (October 2007, taken by me)



The centre was established in 2006 by an NGO, *Working Together*, which aims to overcome the unemployment problem of young people. According to the official site of the centre, it provides several job-related programmes such as free lectures on how to get a job or how to set up a business, free meeting space, and free counselling services. Two contract employees were operating the centre: joo-joo, the head of the center, and the other, a female counsellor. The former was in charge of organizing some activities

for the unemployed young such as a set up business lecture; the latter provided free counselling service once a week. When I conducted research, their contract with the NGO was nearly ending and most activities of the centre also did not work due to the low level of participation.

In this situation, there was little chance where I could meet ordinary inhabitants of Baeksu Hall. During the fieldwork in Hope Hall, a few offline meetings were planned but it was not uncommon for a meeting to be cancelled due to the lack of attendance. For example, a birthday party for people who were born in November was cancelled because no one attended. The year-end party was the only offline activity that I could attend during my fieldwork. In that case, 34 people confirmed online that they would attend, but only 8 people showed up. In particular, women rarely participated in offline activities. The year-end party (15 December 2007) was a case in point. Joo-joo explained the reason:

In the beginning, women also came out. When 60 people gathered, 16 of them were women. However, women who have attended a meeting wouldn't come out again. These days, women hardly attend offline meetings. When we [men] meet offline, we often drink alcohol a lot. That seems to make women feel uncomfortable to stay longer. (joo-joo, male in the mid-30s, the head of the centre)

As such, the offline meeting of Baeksu Hall seemed to have a very strong macho culture: most attendees were male and they often displayed their macho behaviours and got drunk; men tend to think of an offline meeting as an opportunity to meet women. As a result, it seemed common for women to experience sexual harassment in offline meetings, which caused women to hesitate attending off-line meetings.

2.2 *Baekjo's meeting*

In this situation, as I described earlier (See 3.1 in CH 4), recruiting female inhabitant of Baeksu Hall/ Hope Hall was a huge challenge to me. I organised a

‘meeting of *baekjo*’, which was a group meeting exclusively for women and ran it once a week for six weeks. With the permission of the head of the centre, I posted a notice of the meeting on the bulletin board of Baeksu Hall, the online community and four female members confirmed their attendance by email. The first meeting held in the seminar room of Hope Hall. The head of the centre promised to offer some support including a place and refreshments. However, when I arrived at the centre for the first meeting, the door of the building was closed and he did not turn up, let alone prepare a room and refreshment. Fortunately, I managed to get inside the building and hold the first meeting. Since then, I arranged another place for the meeting in order to reduce the unpredictability of the process and to provide a warm and secure place for the participants. All the rest of the meetings were held in a seminar café in *Shichon*. I chose the place for several reasons. Most of all, Shinchon was very close to the centre and one of the hot ‘cultural spots’ among Korean young people, where the participants of the meeting would love to go. In addition, a seminar café has several advantages for operating the meeting. A seminar café is usually located near universities and specifically designed for small group meetings such as study group meetings. It provides private seminar rooms and refreshments including snacks, bread, cup-noodle, and several kinds of drinks for reasonable entry price. By using a seminar café, I especially wanted to secure the privacy of participants, which was very important because the participants were very sensitive to be heard by others. The meeting were held in a private room, where we enjoyed refreshments for three hours. All conversations were recorded with the permission of the participants.

The first meeting was a pre-meeting talking about what they wanted to do in *baekjo*’s meeting. Based on the conversations in the first meeting, I planned to talk

about daily life, their dreams, family and job each week (see the below table), but it did not work well.

Table 1 Focus group: baekjo's meeting

| Time | Theme | Attendants | Place | Note |
|---------------------|---------------|------------------|--------------|------------------|
| Week 1 (24.11.2007) | Introduction | Eunmi, Amin | Hope Hall | Pre-meeting |
| Week 2 (02.12.2007) | Everyday life | Eunjung, Amin | Seminar cafe | |
| Week 3 (09.12.2007) | Dream | None | Seminar café | Cancelled |
| Week 4 (16.12.2007) | Family | Amin | Seminar cafe | Camera Interview |
| Week 5 (23.12.2007) | Job | None | Seminar café | Cancelled |
| Week 6 (29.12.2007) | Year-end | Eunjung, Amin | Seminar café | |

Late arrivals and no shows without any notice were common. I usually booked a seminar room for four people to use for three hours, but I had to wait an hour for them to arrive and the meeting to begin. On the third meeting, I invited a professor to give them advice since all participants wanted to enter university. However, the group interviews had to be cancelled because no one showed up. After the third meeting, I nearly gave up running the meeting, but one informant (Amin) was very disappointed because, she said, the meeting was the only chance to come out of her place and meet others. So I continued running the meeting with Amin. Like this case, late arrivals and no-shows provided me with a natural environment to interview them individually while we were waiting for others to arrive (See 3 in CH 4 for more methodological discussion on this issue).

To me, their life stories were too fragmented to draw a whole picture. Thus, besides the group meeting, I individually met Eunjung and Amin several times (for 2-3 hours each time). We met at a café, restaurant, and theatre (both Eunjung and Amin loved to enjoy ‘cultural life’ in those places like other young people do). Interestingly, the punctuality problem dramatically reduced when I met them individually. Over the period, observing the process by which they gained a temporary job and were fired (see the below table), I was able to observe their extremely short cycle of employment and its impact on their daily life. The following are the stories of three women that I met through *baekjo*’s meeting.

Table 2 Participants in the focus group

| Name | Age | Previous Jobs | Education | Dream |
|---------|-----|---|---|------------------------------------|
| Eunjung | 24 | Mobile factory worker, Assistant for wedding | High school leaver (qualification exam) | Operating an alternative school |
| Amin | 22 | Mobile factory worker | High school graduate (a vocational school) | Legal staff |
| Eunmi | 21 | Telemarketer | High school graduate | Kindergarten teacher |

3 THREE WOMEN’S STORIES

3.1 Eunjung (24), ‘Am I a parasite?’

3.1.1 Life trajectory

Eunjung (not her real name, 24) had lived with her family (her mother and an older brother) in Incheon, one of the satellite cities of Seoul, and started to live alone in Seoul at the age of 19. I met her first in the volunteers’ meeting in Hope Hall. She was the only female volunteer of Hope Hall. Two days later, I had an individual interview with

her at a cafe in Shinchon. She was good looking with a pretty face and tall body, laughing a lot while she talked about her life. In contrast to her ‘pleasant’ look, her life story was very depressing. She started to tell her story by describing herself as a ‘former-*Hikikomori*’. *Hikikomori* is a Japanese term to refer to the phenomenon of reclusive individuals who have chosen to withdraw from social life, often seeking extreme degrees of isolation and confinement due to various personal and social factors in their lives. The term began to be widely used in South Korea since a Korean TV programme used the term to report a similar social phenomenon in the mid 2000s.

Eunjung: Since I graduated middle school, I didn’t go to school. A really bad rumour about me had spread (in my middle school).... It is too embarrassing to tell you what it was. Anyway, I was marked as a very strange person. [...] I told my mom my problems repeatedly with tears...but she didn’t take my problem seriously. The bullying started at the second year of middle school and drove me mad. Having barely graduated middle school, I stayed at home for one year. I went out just twice to a supermarket in one year. I feared I might come across one of the girls from school... [long silence]

She kept herself in her room for two years ‘playing by herself’ (she didn’t have a TV or a computer in her room). According to her, the long-term withdrawal to home caused considerable conflicts with her family:

Eunjung: People might think it would be comfortable to stay at home, but that is not the case. My family thought I am a strange and weird person and tried to pull me out, but I resisted to go out and stayed at home. ... People scolded me that I am pursuing only my own comfort. One day my mother told me, “How could you only think about yourself?” It really hurt me. hahaha. (big laugh). I asked her back what I did wrong. She said, “You are a parasite living on your parents’ money without making any money by yourself.”

She started to use the Internet for the first time with her brother’s computer.

Eunjung: When I was 17, my brother used the Internet. I didn’t know how to use it and didn’t have a friend to teach me. I was so curious that I turned brother’s computer on and tried to use the Internet by myself, scared if I would break it down. Hahaha... I think the Internet was helpful for me. I posted my review of movies... I was really surprised

and pleased to see 80 clicks on my poor writing. People read my poor writing!!

She was impressed by the fact that many people paid attention to what she wrote because she felt that she got respect and acknowledgement from others.

After two years' living as a *hikikomori*, her mother sent her to a centre for adolescent girls in Seoul. According to Eunjung, a Catholic foundation operates the centre mainly for runaway girls.

Eunjung: There were about ten teenage girls besides me. At that time, making 'aid-relations'⁴² with adult men was prevalent among teenage girls. Girls who were caught in such situations were forced to come to the shelter.... I made my first peer relation with them. I even attempted to run away from the centre with them. Hahaha ...

With help from the introduction of the centre, she entered an alternative school, which is specialised for vulnerable students. In the school, she had positive relations with other students and teachers, actively participating in several programmes. 'It was the first time I met teachers who are kind to students like me.' The school operated a joint programme for *hikikomori* with a Japanese school. Eunjung visited Japan three times attending the programme. From the way she explained the programme as 'lively Korean students helping passive Japanese students', I gathered that she did not recognise herself as a *hikikomori* at the moment. Later, it was through a Korean TV programme that she first recognised herself as *hikikomori*:

Eunjung: One day, my mother shouted, "Look! Here are people just like you on TV". Soon after *60 minutes* (a investigate TV programme) reported *hikikomori* problems, people started to pay attention on *something like hiki...*(lowering her voice). I didn't want to see it....because it was completely my story.....

⁴² 'Aid-relations' refers to the paid sexual relations between teenage-girls and adult men. This phenomenon widely spread in Japan and Korea in 2000s, especially among runaway girls.

During the interview, she seemed to feel ashamed that she was a *hikikomori* and worried if someone else might hear that word. Every time she mentioned a the word, she whispered or hesitated to use it.

She said that the TV programme made her depressed again and in an attempt to recover from her depression, she searched the Internet for a community of people with ‘mental problems’ (in her words). She found an online community, entitled *a journey to find myself*, and actively participated in the community.

Eunjung: I participated in the cafe with great joy. This cafe helped me a lot. Because I didn’t have a friend to talk to, when I felt gloomy or sad I wrote my feelings in the café. dadadadadada [typing sounds] Then, a number of replies followed. It was really helpful. What people need in hard times is not a perfect solution but support. With one supporting word, people can put up with their difficulties.

In the community, she was selected as ‘king of reply’ –which is a title given to a person who makes the most comments on other’s writings- and based on her active involvement, she became one of the operators of the community. In the community, she organised a self-help group with six other *hikikomori* and maintained the meeting for three months. She explained the motivation for organising the meeting was to prove that she is not a ‘useless’ or ‘selfish’ person but someone who can care about and help others. In searching for a free space for the meeting, Eunjung found Hope Hall and started to actively participate in the voluntary work there.

3.1.2 Work trajectory

‘My life is worth 300,000 won’ (Eunjung, 24).

Since moving out from her parents’ house at age 19, Eunjung has had various temporary jobs: an assistant care worker, office assistant, assistant in a wedding shop,

mobile phone factory worker, jewelry factory worker, salesgirl in a museum, assistant in a job agency, etc. For the last 5 years, in most of her work places, she has worked from 9am to 9 or 10pm from Monday to Saturday monthly and paid 300,000 won (about 300 USD) on average - which is far less than what the legal minimum wage is (800,000 won). The poor working conditions led her to change her job frequently. Her average working period in a job is less than one month. For example, last year, she received a government job-training programme and began to work in a jewelery factory but ‘ran away in a month’.

Eunjung: It took a very long time to make a ring. They blamed me for my poor skills, but I was just a beginner. Shouldn’t they train me and help me make the ring? I had to work everyday until I completed the order of the day. I was fed up with their criticism. I was sick of being condemned. So I quit. ... Then I thought I was not going to be able to work again....

While I was organizing offline meetings, Eunjung got a job as a ‘junior reporter’ (in her words) in an online newspaper. She told me how she got the job:

Eunjung: I have uploaded articles on several Internet journals and visited one of them. The chief said he was not happy at all with my posting (a big laugh) because there were too many misspellings and wrong sentences. If it were good writing, it would be worthy of editing, but mine is not.... Hahaha... He asked me how I made a living, so I answered that I was planning to deliver newspapers. He offered me to work in his office instead of delivering newspapers for the same money, which is 300,000 won.

At first, she was very excited with her new job, expecting to learn how to write:

Eunjung: I feel like I’ve become a different person from the people of Hope Hall. People at Hope Hall seem very conservative. People in my office are different. They are ‘progressive’ like the title of the journal. On my first day, the chief asked me, “Have you heard about feminism? You should learn it. We don’t order you to make coffee for us.”

However, when I met her again in the focus group interview a week later, she was very disappointed with the job because she was required to do office chores such as wash dishes, clean a freezer, and make coffee.

Eunjung: I am condemned for those chores not only for my poor writing. They scold me that I'm not good at anything. I believe this is a good chance for me, but I feel I am losing myself, which gives me bad influence.... So, I am not sure if I can continue working there....

[I: When do you feel you are losing yourself?]

Eunjung: People need a sense of being 'useful' to someone. But, they always point out what I did wrong. ... the chief said he couldn't endure a stupid person. He told me that he didn't think that I'm stupid because I am a woman, but isn't it mean that I am stupid because I am a woman? There are a lot of things like that...

[I: In which aspect, do you think the job is a good chance for you?]

Eunjung: Something related to media... It seems like that I became a critical person if I were in this area. (to Amin) Have you graduated a university?

Amin: No. I am a high school graduate.

Eunjung: Me, too. There are so many places for high school graduates, but there is no place for us to be respected as we are.

For Eunjung, far from the mainstream discourse of lack of the amount of jobs, 'there are so many places' for high school graduates, but the problem is that those jobs are humiliating jobs where she experienced much discrimination. Eunjung believed that it was not only because she was a woman but also because she was a high school graduate:

Eunjung: Whenever I make a mistake, the chief told me that he wouldn't have hired me if he had considered educational background important. "I hired you because of your passion, but I am not a man of charity", he said. In the next office, there is a volunteer who graduate Ewha university (the most privileged women's university in Korea). One day she was away, the boss of the next office asked me to help prepare for the year-end party instead of her. My job was to call people to announce the party. When I called people on the list, most of them asked me if I were the woman from Ewha University. 70 of 100 people referred to her as the person who graduated Ewha. (silence) I realised people recognise others by educational background not by personality.

Through the experience, Eunjung realised again the importance of educational background in the workplace. Thus, another week later, she finally quit the job and started to prepare for the university entrance examination. When I met her after she quit the job in January 2008, she was actively participating in another online community of people who are interested in setting up an alternative school. Eunjung said her dream is

to operate an alternative school where she could help those like herself. Two months later, she entered a small college majoring in social welfare.

3.1.3 *Digital media use*

Eunjung expressed some contradictory feelings about the use of digital media. As I described earlier, on the one hand, she was seeking to utilize the Internet to make social connections, which, she believed, increased her chances to get a job. On the other hand, she also feared being attacked and isolated by people on the Internet:

Eunjung: Since people are anonymous on the Internet, they often attack others. I have experienced several cases of cyber bullying in the community that I actively participated in. It really hurt me. [...] Not to be left out, people have to learn how to properly act in an online community. I have to control when I get in and out and not to be marked.... You have to grasp some skills not to be isolated in the Internet, controlling the degree of participation....

When online relations develop into offline relations, other issues emerge. Among others, Eunjung's good-looking appearance seemed to help her easily make good relationships and made her welcome in offline meetings where men usually dominate. Simultaneously, however, it increased the chance of being come on to.

Eunjung: In offline meetings, men always make a pass on women. I am scared to become closer because they come on to me.

Similarly, Eunjung also expressed paradoxical feelings about her mobile phone as well. Her mobile phone looked very fancy and expensive. She boasted that it was waterproof, but her waterproof mobile phone gave her considerable financial troubles. The price of the mobile phone itself is as much as her monthly income. She bought it by installment payment, which became a big debt to her. The mobile phone bill was also a burden to her. She was irregularly earning 300,000 won per month and paying 200,000 won for

her accommodation. Thus, she only had 100,000 left for living. Her mobile phone fare averagely amounted to 50,000 won, which took up half of her available money.

However, it seemed almost unthinkable for her to live without mobile phone because ‘all human relations are made through it.’

Figure 2 Eunjung's mobile phone



To Eunjung, digital media is something that makes something happen in her life but it also hurts her as well, forming her contradictory feelings about her mobile phone.

Eunjung: It gives me two extreme feelings. It's really good, but it can be really bad.

[I: What's the good aspect?]

Eunjung: All human relations are made through it (mobile phone). Especially, I can text to someone... (long pause in thinking) Do you often delete texts?

[I: No, I don't until I have to when inbox is full.]

Eunjung: I... but... I often delete them.

[I: Is there any particular reason for that?]

Eunjung: Well... I always delete all texts and calling history. One day I saw my brother's mobile phone and found he doesn't do so [sign] I don't know why I am doing so, but deleting has become a habit of mine. I once deleted all the contact numbers except my family. A girl saw it and said, "You're scary."

[I: Why do you think you did so?]

Eunjung: Well... I don't know why exactly ... when many things happened simultaneously, I want to forget everything, don't you? When human relations are unstable... when I was immature, human relations are also very instant and temporary... Then, mobile phones are also

unstable... I turn off mobile phones... Recently, I don't delete that often because I came to know where I belong. It's amazing to me.

[I: Do you delete contact numbers in order to block them?]

Eunjung: I delete when I come to hate humans.

[I: Not a particular person but all humans?]

Eunjung: It starts with a particular person, then changes to hating humans per se.... Um... However, I am always longing for something... always... (a big laugh) Something is likely to happen... I always long for someone to call me. It is hopeful if I properly use it.

[I: How much does a mobile phone mean to you?]

Eunjung: It means a lot. I always bring it with me. I am really worried if it goes wrong when I drop it. It is so precious to me.

3.2 Amin (22), 'How can I meet people without the Internet?'

Amin (not her real name, 22) was the first person who appeared in the first meeting. She is small (about 150 cm) and was wearing a pink parka with bobbed hair, which made her look like an elementary school student. She also has small problems in speech such as ambiguous pronunciation and a little stutter. From the beginning, Mina actively attended the group meeting, establishing a stable rapport with me. I met her four times in the group meetings and additionally conducted individual interviews twice and occasionally had a lengthy messenger chatting. Since she often contacted me whenever she faced issues she wanted to discuss, we maintained a personal relationship online and offline during a year fieldwork period in Seoul.

3.2.1 Life history

Amin was living with her mother in Incheon – same as Eunjung, one of the poorer cities neighbouring Seoul. Her father left them in the IMF era, leaving a lot of debt to her mother. Her mother had run a small business paying off the debt.

Her suffering from bullying started from elementary school. Amin thought that she became a target of bullying owing to her weak appearance.

Amin: Since my elementary school, a group of boys beat me because I was very weak. Most students in the elementary school advanced to the same middle school in the neighborhood and thus the boys' bullying on me continued through the middle school hood. It was really tough time for me.

In total, she had been regularly beaten for eight years. To escape from bullying, she advanced to a vocational high school furthest away from her neighborhood. Fortunately, in the high school, she managed to build a good relationship with several girls.

Furthermore, Amin seemed to have had been poorly treated at home with occasional physical punishment since she was a little child.

Amin: Because both of my parents had worked, my grandmother brought me up. I am the only girl among her grandchildren. She was very strict to me. She fed my male cousins and me differently. My parents treated me in a similar way. When I did something wrong, they beat me rather than took care of me.

Her father kept leaving and coming back home and often beat her mother. Amin seemed to feel pity for her mother, but at the same time, she felt scared of her mother's unpredictable behavior. What Amin worried about most seemed to be how to maintain a good relationship with her mother, whom Amin was heavily dependent on. Without any cash for allowance, her mother was offering Amin three basic things: a traffic card, mobile phone and an internet connection. Instead, Amin was required to do all the house chores. Whenever Amin made a decision, she was really worried if her mother would be upset about it. For instance, when we went to see a movie, after seeing a movie, she asked me to go buy a present for her mother's birthday. Amin bought a hat for her mother, but looked nearly panicked holding the present, worried about her response to the present. In the end, she called her mother and said she bought a hat. As Amin was worried, her mother was upset and asked her to return it. As such, Amin often expressed strong anxiety about her mother, which makes it difficult for them to

discuss her problems. I got a message several times from Amin when she was in panic due to her mother's violent behavior.

Amin: What can I do? She started again. She kicked over the dinner table and broke many things.

Online fan communities

Following her father who loved watching Korean historical dramas, Amin had also watched many Korean historical dramas. Watching a historical drama, Amin became a fan of the heroine. One day, she came to use the Internet with a computer in her mother's store, and joined an online fan community of the actress. Since then, fan clubbing has been one of the most important parts of her life.

Amin: When I was in the third year of middle school, I joined an online fan community and started to communicate with others. [.....] I rarely spoke to anyone until then. I was too scared to talk to people around me because of being beaten. In fact, I joined the fan club because I wanted to communicate, rather than simply because I liked the star....because I felt stuff..... I can say anything (in online community) because they don't know who I am. Without the Internet, how can I meet people?

She could make friends through the fan club activities. Until now, she has been participating in several fan communities of actresses. She believes that it enabled her to endure her harsh life. The following quotation shows how much the star meant to her.

Amin: One day in my middle school hood, I was so sick that I couldn't get up for three days. But, I got up to watch a historical drama where my favorite star played...and I got better after watching the female star.... Just thinking of someone who I liked made me happy and it helped me a lot in enduring my harsh life because it gave me power to live my life.
[I: What did you like about her most?]
She has what I don't have. I was extremely introverted at that time, but she looked like a woman with cool and masculine spirit.

Amin likes only actresses, not male actors, who play tenacious characters in historical dramas, who are ‘strong but warm-hearted, taking care of weak persons.’ It reflects both her ideal image of parents and that of herself.

Amin had participated in almost every fan event of the actress and visited her house and the shooting sites. In doing so, she experienced another feeling of alienation. She found it difficult to maintain relationships with people once she met them offline. In addition, fans were segregated according to the amount of money they put into for the star, and the star treated them differently.

Amin: There were core members who gave her very expensive presents. The actress liked them a lot. One day, I had been waiting more than three hours in extremely cold weather in order to celebrate her winning a prize. However, when she came out, she directly went to them and talked only to them ignoring other fans. It really hurt me.

Since then, she has been a fan of less famous actresses but continued to face some similar situations in her practice of fandom of other stars.

3.2.2 *Work trajectory*

Having graduated from her vocational high school in 2005, through an introduction from the school, she started to work at a mobile phone factory with several other students.

Amin: It was really hard to work there because I had to work from 8 am to 12 am without a single day off. I had to work on Saturdays and sometimes even on Sundays.

The working conditions in the factory seemed extremely poor, and her hours were long. According to Amin, people in an assembly line work more than 14 hours a day (regularly from 8 am until 10pm, or frequently until 11pm or 12 am when there was a heavy workload) with only one ten- minute break every 4 hours. In return, they received

a minimum level of monthly income (around 1,000,000 won). Several months after, Amin got fired for her 'poor skills' (in the supervisor's words).

According to her, it is not uncommon that a small factory hires people in a busy season and then fires them after a week without paying at all. Amin then spent six months at home, recovering from the bad experience and searching for another kind of job. She got a job as an office assistant but got fired again in 5 days with no pay.

Amin: In the job interview, I told them I couldn't type well, but they said I could learn. But, once I started to work, they changed their attitudes and blamed me for my poor word processing skill and fired me.

After having another six months' withdrawal at home, she entered another factory assembling air conditioners but got fired again in a week. Even though she was paid for the week this time, the last day in the factory left her a deep trauma.

Amin: There was a shuttle bus to the factory. On the day, I missed the bus... no...I was waiting for the bus but the bus passed me by. So I took a taxi. When I was going to get off, I found my traffic card out of order. I phoned to mom and she told the driver that she was going to send the money to his mobile phone account. But he didn't let me get off holding my wrist. ... In doing so, I was 20 minutes late, so I got fired for being late. [Long Pause] I asked him to let me work through that day and cried badly in the toilet.

Afterward, it became barely imaginable for her to try to get a job again, and thus she stayed at home for about ten months.

Amin: I couldn't dare to try to get a job. I was scared that I was not going to be able to work ever again. Those days, I felt really gloomy about my future.... I didn't know how I could live..... "How could I live? How could I live?" I thought I might commit a suicide in the end.

To get some help, she searched for a free counseling service on the Internet. After one month of online counseling, she visited the centre and received offline counseling once a week for one year. Receiving free counseling, Amin resumed to apply for a job such as a clerk in a PC room, sales girl in a convenient store, office assistant, etc., but could

not get a job. In addition, the consultant helped her to make specific plan for her dream. Amin found that she had wanted to be a kindergarten teacher. The counselor introduced her to an educational institution to get a kindergarten teacher certificate.

Amin: It seems that I don't know the ways in which the world operated... I am so slow to realize the rules and accept them... Even though I have been dreaming of being a kindergarten teacher since when I was a child, I didn't know what to do in order to become a teacher.

Following the counsellor's advice, Amin enrolled in the institution and took classes for six months. When we first met, Amin was looking for a kindergarten to do teaching practice. In early December 2007, when we were having our group meetings, Amin got an assistant teacher job in a small kindergarten in Incheon and began to work. Amin was supposed to work from 9am to 6pm for 600,000 won, which was far less than the legal minimum wage. Although she was employed as an assistant teacher, Amin found that there was no experienced teacher at that time. The former teacher quit the job without any notice, and that was why Amin was hired. She took care of all sorts of tasks, from cleaning to teaching, being blamed by the operator of the kindergarten for any problems. She worked from 9 am to 7pm, taking care of 12 children including four infants. However, at the end of December, the employer refused to pay the full amount of 600,000 won because Amin did not work on 25 and 31 December, which are Christmas and the year-end. Since then, Amin began to stay at home, watching Korean historical dramas and surfing on the computer.

3.2.3 *Digital labour and intimate relationship*

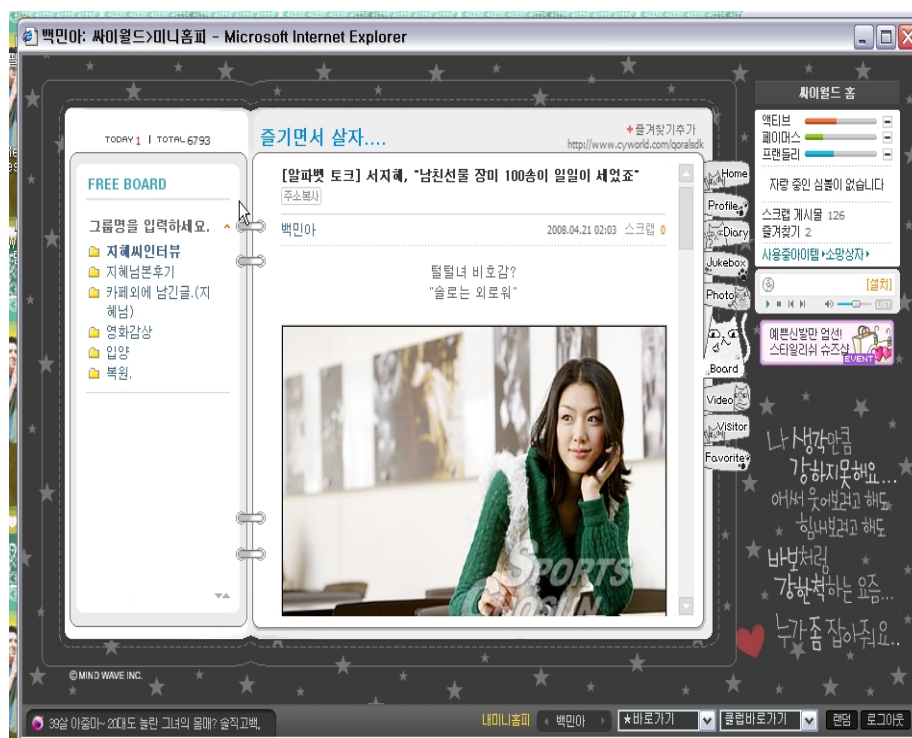
What Amin really wanted in her life seemed a small and simple thing, to construct a stable intimate relationship, but it seemed really difficult for her to achieve.

Amin: I want to earn money more than to go to university because I want to live an ordinary life like others... Whenever I meet friends (high

school friends), they all pay for me since they are working. It makes me embarrassed. I would like to buy meals for them too...

As the above quotation shows, to Amin, the lack of money formed an unbalanced relationship with others, which makes her feel uncomfortable with meeting others. In contrast, on the Internet, she seemed to create her position as a giver rather than receiver. In her relation with the stars, she has tried to help the actresses as much as she can by utilising her 'free labour' (Terranova, 2000).

Figure 3 Amin's blog with a picture of her favourite star



Amin's personal homepage is the crucial site in the process. It is full of pictures of actresses that she has loved so far. In one section, there are a list of copied materials from other sites such as recent news and pictures of the female stars. In another section, there are some pictures that Amin took when she visited fan meetings or shooting sites. Other fans copy them and paste them to their personal homepages. By doing so, Amin contributes to making the star famous. In return, Amin receives occasional short comments from the star, which means a lot to Amin.

On the other hand, the long time use of the Internet was creating considerable conflicts between Amin and her mother in her daily life. Her mother occasionally disconnected the Internet in order to reduce Amin's use. One day, her mother finally broke her keyboard into two pieces, but it did not stop Amin from using the Internet.

Amin: My mom broke my keyboard.

[I: how are you typing now then?]

Amin: I'm writing by copying and pasting letters on the Internet. Could you text me to my mobile phone?

3.3 Eunmi (21), 'Do I look strange?'

The third woman that I met in the group meeting was Eunmi (not her real name, 21). She attended the first meeting by the introduction of Eunjung. She was a member of the online community and participated in the self-help group that Eunjung organized.

It was very cold when I met Eunmi, but she wore a short skirt and shirt. She hardly made eye contact with others, speaking in a very small voice, and looked very sensitive to others' response.

3.3.1 *Life history*

Eunmi was living with her mother in a northern part of Seoul. To my surprise, Eunmi was also a victim of bullying in her childhood. Her experience of bullying started in kindergarten, which made her speechless for ten years until high school.

Eunmi: I just nodded for 'yes', and shook my head for 'no'.

[I: It must have been really tough. How could you complete your school without dropping out?]

Eunmi: I also *did* want to leave school, but people think badly of people who drop out of schools. So I endured thinking of that....because I wanted to go to university.

After graduating from high school, she stayed at home for one year without going out anywhere for the whole year, preparing for the university entrance examination. When I met her, she was trying to go out, but was still suffering from fear of people.

Eunmi: I feel dizzy if I come out. If someone looks at me, I am scared that they might speak ill of me. It is really stressful for me to go out. I imagine people would hurt me even though I do nothing wrong to them.Thus, staying at home is most comfortable for me. But, I know I shouldn't stay at home anymore in order to make a life..... So.... I am trying in various ways.

Eunmi was aiming to enter a law college in order to join a legal staff (judicial scrivener). In her high school, she prepared to enter a fine art college but found out that it would be really hard to make a living as a fine artist and thus changed her goal.

Eunmi: I am scared to go to school or work....because I had stayed at home...as I was scared to go out...about for one year.....I had stayed only in my room without going out anywhere.

[I: I am impressed that you came out to here and took an exam in spite of your situation.]

Eunmi: Yes.. recently I got much better, but still don't know many things... especially about human relationships. In fact, I entered a university in the beginning of this year.....but couldn't get used to being with people. I had difficulties in mingling with my seniors, so I left..... This is my third time to prepare the university examination. Because I fear people, it was very hard.... I don't want to fail again when I enter university.

Like Amin, Eunmi also searched the Internet figuring out how to make a difference in her life, and found out what her symptom was.

Eunmi: On the Internet, I found out that I had selective mutism and it lasts temporarily during childhood and gets better later.

Last year, Eunmi joined an online community for people with anthropobia. According to her, someone who has overcome the fear of people opened the community. It was in the community that Eunmi came to know Eunjung. At that time, Eunjung was organizing a self-help offline meeting in the community and Eunmi attended the

meeting. Through people who she met in the offline meeting, she came to join another online communities including Baeksu Hall.

3.3.2 *Work trajectory*

Eunmi felt the burden of being dependent on her mother and thus wanted to make money for herself. She wants to work as a telemarketer since she believes that work is easier and the pay is better than in other jobs available to high school graduates. She had several interviews but failed to get a job. She thinks it is owing to her unconfident attitude and appearance. Thus, from our meeting, Eunmi wanted to learn how to speak to others, how to speak English, and how to dress up tidy, which she considered as ‘necessary things to be learned’ for her everyday life as well as for her career. In the first focus group meeting, in the middle of conversation, Eunmi suddenly asked how she looked to me.

Eunmi: By the way..... do I... do you think... do I look a bit strange compared to other?

[I: Well.... You look cautious.]

Eunmi: What do you think about being cautious? If people treat you very cautiously, how would you think of them?

[I: I might wonder if they don't trust me.]

Eunmi: Do you think that gives any harm to you?

I: I don't think so.

Eunmi: (long pause) I think we can't judge which is good or bad if we don't understand the stories behind of it. All could have their own reasons that we don't know.

[I: I agree.]

Eunmi: Do you think ordinary people think so? That is.. there is no line between wrong and right?

[I: What do you think?]

Eunmi: I don't know since I don't have enough social experience. I have one more thing to ask you. What kinds of people do you like or don't like? What is your standard?

[I: How about yours?]

Eunmi: I want to hear your opinion. When you meet people, how do you judge if you like this person or don't like that person? (long pause)

[I: Why do you want to know other's standard?]

Eunmi: Because I don't understand others... I don't know general standards in human relationships.

I: How would it be helpful if you know the standards?

Eunmi: Um.... The standard could be a criteria in judging other's behaviours. I heard that ignorance of others' thought causes anthropobia because of uncertainty. So if I know more about other's standard, I could make better relationships.

Eunmi seemed to want to have a reference system for social life. Since she had been in an extreme isolation without talking to others for ten years, she wants to learn and practice a proper way in forming relationships with others.

I could not meet Eunmi anymore after our first meeting. Although she had confirmed to attend our meeting twice, she could never make it. It still seemed very difficult for her to come out to the public. This is the last text from her:

Eunmi: I took a subway to the place, but I suddenly felt too dizzy and too scared to attend the meeting.

4 CRUEL HOPE

This chapter has explored the nature of the particular precarious lives of three women that I met through Hope Hall and how media features in those lives. As an undereducated young woman from poor families, the women have commonly experienced an extreme level of precarity at work, at home, and in social relations. This increased their sense of frustration and insecurity, leading them to take a form of life with an extreme social withdrawal as an attempt of protecting themselves against any potential threat. Those withdrawals embodied as affect such as anthropobia and mutism, which is a refusal of communication and being social. These experiences have also profoundly undermined their potential ability to become a 'good worker'.

The routes that Korean society offers to the women to become a good worker are two: 'material labour' in a factory and 'affective labour' in service. For the three

women, factory work accompanies its extreme level of physical and mental exploitation with long working hours and inhumane treatment, which lead them to move away to various jobs in personal service or office work. Three women showed a difference in the level of chance to get a job in service. For Eunjung, who had a respectable level of beauty and communication ability, it was not that difficult to get such a temporary job. However, due to the extreme level of precarity, she continuously ended up quitting these jobs within a month. She expressed herself as someone who does not fit with a normal workplace. On the other hand, for Amin and Eunmi, to get a job in personal service itself was a big challenge. They attributed it to their own lack of the *proper* attitudes (e.g. confidence) and appearances (e.g. sweet voice and beauty), which are required in such jobs.

In this situation, when I conducted the research, they were dreaming to get a more 'professional job', which they believed could offer a depending life, on which they could feel themselves as a 'normal being' in society. The routes Eunjung and Amin aimed to achieve this through were typical women's job in the social service, which is Hardt and Negri's another example of affective labour, such as an alternative school teacher and a kindergarten teacher. However, in reality, these are typical precarious jobs that the government has created for women (See 4.3 in CH 2). In contrast, Eunmi was hoping to become a legal staff, which she believes has lack of gender discrimination as well as the prospect of the good life. Considering their conditions, what they want may seem quite unrealistic. However, as Berlant (2007: 275) read from *Rosetta*, it seems to me 'that the route is a rut matters not' to these three women. What matters desperately to the three women seem the two interrelated things: feelings of intimacy and feelings of being normal. The women seem to consider the latter as a condition of the former.

These women commonly expressed their strong desire to feel themselves as a normal being in society, which Berlant called ‘aspirational normativity’ (2007: 275). For these women, getting a job is important not just to make their living, but also, more importantly ‘to feel that she has earned her value the way ‘normal’ people do, who produce something of value to others’ (ibid: 274). That is also what Eunjung wanted to feel through her online community activities and a welfare job; that is what Amin wanted to feel by paying for her friends’ meals; that is what Eumi wanted to achieve by learning how to speak, dress, and act.

However, the stories reveal the existence of a big gap between their desire and their reality. What they confirmed through their experience in work places and social relations is how ‘abnormal’ they are, which led them to repeatedly withdrawal from the public to the private space. With the gap, the women in the research had many relations of what Berlant called ‘cruel optimism’ (2006, 2011) in order to have a feeling of intimacy and being normal. With the notion, Berlant refers to an ‘attachment to compromised conditions of possibility’ (2006: 21), a situation that one has a strong attachment to an object, which is actually harmful or threatening to one’s well-being, because one senses she/he could not sustain one’s life any longer without it. That is, ‘a relation of cruel optimism exists when something you desire is actually an obstacle to your flourishing’ (2011: 1). A common object of cruel optimism that three women described in their account is the university. Eunmi’s attachment to university is extremely ‘cruel’ because it actually threatening her well-being, stirring up affects such as ‘feeling dizzy and too scared’. Similarly, Eunjung and Amin showed a double attitude toward the necessity of a university education. On one hand, they thought it ‘useless’ because thousands of those with university degrees were unemployed, which showed them that a university degree does not guarantee anything. Nonetheless, they

considered it ‘necessary’ to get one not only to escape their precarious work place but also to exist as an ‘ordinary’ person in society where, they felt, people identify others by one’s university. Thus, they attempted to enter university even though they should face more difficulties to pay for it without any premise of reward. In reality, enrolling in an education institution seemed to make their lives more precarious.

Another common object of cruel optimism is beauty. The women expressed their anger on people who judge them by appearance, but at the same time, they desire to be a ‘pretty woman’ in escape from people’s bad judgement on them. However, it costs too much for them to buy clothes and cosmetics to become ‘pretty’, but they were required to have a proper make-up and look for a job. In this situation, Eunjung was investing her money in buying clothes, for which the head of the centre blamed her as a consumerist girl in the volunteer’s meeting. Her favourite hobby was to try a free sample in cosmetic stores.

The notion of cruel optimism can also offer a useful way of understanding the use of digital media by these women. As I described earlier, their use of digital media is closely related to their fantasy of a normal life and social relations. Eunjung’s habit of deleting all texts and contacts in her mobile phone reveals the complexity of how her cruel optimism regarding the mobile phone operates in relation to her desire for a social life, where she can have a feeling of emotional security and belonging, in daily life. Eunjung’s life was endlessly on the move – she geographically moved her house four times in the past year including twice during my fieldwork period and also moved her work frequently. Her nomadic life barred her from building a stable social relation, forming a sense of being isolated with no prospect for the future. To Eunjung, mobile phone means a potential to ‘make something happen’. However, her optimism of mobile phone is located in the future not in the present. In the present, the mobile phone

seemed to cause her some serious economic problems. She bought her fancy mobile phone on instalment, which became a huge debt to her, and except the price of the equipment, she had to pay the mobile phone bill, which amounts to nearly half of her living cost. When I conducted the research, Eunjung was actually suffering from the burden of the mobile phone cost. In this regard, it was threatening her well being in the present. Also, what the history of her use of mobile phone demonstrates was just her present unstable social relationships, which is formed through her precarious life. Thus, her habit of deleting texts and contacts can be interpreted as a performance to erase her failure in the present and a wish to move beyond.

The most distinctive feature of Amin's use of media use is her strong attachment to female stars, which is deeply connected to her fantasy of a mother. The fantasy of a 'good mother' came from her 'cruel' relation with her own mother. To Amin, her mother seemed the only person she could depend on for living but also a potential threat in her daily life. Thus, in her account, Amin said that what she desired most was to make a good relationship. Her strong attachment to female stars, who looked strong, generous and caring, can be interpreted as a practice to build an imaginary relation with an imagined mother. Amin believed that this enabled her to live on in spite of her difficulties. However, the practice accompanied by long hours' TV watching and surfing the Internet is actually harmful to build a good relationship with her 'real' mother. That is, it impedes Amin to obtain what she wants in her real life.

As such, the above stories of three women in the research reveal a complex meaning of 'hope' in their life. As Zournazi (2002: 14-15) defines, to the women, hope is 'what sustains life in the face of despair.' Hope is 'not simply the desire for things to come or the betterment of life' but 'the drive or energy that embeds' them in the world. As hooks (hooks, 2001: 131) argues, it can be said that hope is toxic in the end for the

very future-oriented inclination, which makes them ignore their reality and thus only an absence of hope ('hopelessness') can 'create longing for insight and strategies for change.' However, to three women in the research (and many other residents of Baeksu Hall), as Zournazi (2002: 16) argues, without hope, what is left is death of life with no longer any sense of regeneration and renewal, a state that these women were desperately attempting to avoid.

CHAPTER 6 DOING *ALBA*: YOUNG WOMEN ON THE MOVE

1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter explores the lived experiences of a small group of ‘professional college’ educated young women who were doing part time work (*alba*)⁴³ and their digital media use. Three 25-year-old Korean women, each from different socioeconomic backgrounds, participated in the research. I encountered these women through my personal network (the second field, See 3 in CH 4) and the methods that I used for the research are participant observation, individual interviews, informal conversations, and email interviews.

All three women in the research (Yurim, Jooswha, Seoul) were born in 1984, received elementary education during the 1990s, and experienced the IMF era during middle school. Their educational trajectories were entangled with new educational policies regarding the ‘open university’. Yurim and Joowha took a newly launched vocational track for general high school students and advanced to vocational tertiary education. Seoul dropped out of a general high school and joined an alternative education programme, and then later went to an art college. When I first met them, they were doing *alba* in service in Seoul, planning to go abroad for a better future.

My aim is not to represent the experiences of three women as typical cases showing the general situation of college graduated young women. Rather, I aim to get

⁴³ *Alba* refers to both a part-time job and a part-timer in its common use. The word came from the Japanese word, *arubaito*, which is a translation of German word, *arbeit*, meaning work. *Alba* refers to a temporary part time job, which used to utilize young people for unusual tasks not met by the regular labour force. Recently, *alba* has become one of the common types of employment, especially in the service industry, and doing *alba* has become a shared way of life in the contemporary ‘job crisis’ for most young people. In this article, I am using *alba* to refer to part-time work and part-time workers, depending on the context.

detailed descriptions of the informants' life/work trajectories in social contexts, the particular precarity that shapes them, and the way digital media mediates that. Through this, I aim to draw attention to some points of connection between their precarious life, their perception of beauty and their will to go abroad for a better life.

To begin, I will briefly explain the general location of college graduated young women within South Korean labour market. Then, the three women's life stories follow, focusing on their experiences in relation to work and their use of digital media both at work and home. In doing so, this chapter highlights how they adapt to their underemployment and how digital media contributes to the process, how it related to their subjectivities, especially in relation to their femininities.

2 COLLEGE GRADUATED YOUNG WOMEN IN SOUTH KOREA

Taking into account the nature of the labour market offered to 'professional college' graduates is important in understanding the precarious lives of the women in the research not only because this market limits their possible choices but also because it is closely linked to their sense of society and themselves.

In South Korea, the term, 'professional colleges' (*Jeonmundae*) is commonly used to refer to vocational tertiary educational institutions that aim to provide job-related education. Professional colleges were introduced according to the government policies for providing a labour force to the changing industries in South Korea. Since the mid-1990s, these showed extensive growth since the educational reform toward 'open education' and 'life-long education' in 1995. The reform required general universities to enhance their aspects as an 'open university' by intensifying life-long education programmes, adopting part-time registration system and facilitating transfers (Y. S. Kim, 2006: 115). On the other hand, the reform allowed vocational high school graduates to advance to professional colleges or open universities. As a result, the ratio

of vocational high school graduates who advanced to tertiary education greatly increased from 19% in 1995 to 75% in 2008 (J.-W. Lee et al., 1995: 308). The female ratio among all new college students notably grew from 36.8% in 1994 to 52.0% in 2013, surpassing the male ratio. Although most statistical studies and popular media tend to categorise college graduates as one of the highly educated groups, it seems more sensible to categorise them as the less educated groups given the current expansion of advanced education (See 4.4 in CH 2).

Young female college graduates have been a visible working group in South Korea, highly preferred by employers as cheaper labour since the 1990s. For example, in 1990, 68.2% of college-graduated women were employed while only 39.4% of university-graduated women were (Hong, 1997: 91). According to Hong (1997), employers preferred college graduated young women to university graduates, maintaining women's low income and occupational segregation by gender. The situation does not seem to change. In 2010, among young women aged 24-26, college graduates showed the highest employment rate (77.8%), which far surpassed that of the high school graduates (57.7%) and the university educated (70.0%). However, the position of college graduated women appears to dramatically weaken when they reach their 30s. Among women aged 36-38, college graduates showed the lowest employment rate (49.1%). The ratios of high school graduates and of university graduates were 54.2% and 58.7% respectively (Keum, 2011: 54-55). The sharp fall in the employment rate for college graduated women in their 30s implies that college educated women tend to be used as temporary workers.

The labour market for college graduates is highly segregated by gender. For example, in 2009, men with college degrees were likely to be employed in 'men's jobs' such as noncommissioned officer, auto mechanic, technician, and engineer while

women with college degrees were likely employed in ‘women’s jobs’ such as a nurse, nursing teacher, office clerk, and beautician (Keum, 2011: 54-55). In particular, with the expansion of service industry in South Korea,⁴⁴ more and more college graduated women began working in service jobs,⁴⁵ which were low paid and highly segregated by gender. According to Park and Woo (2007), despite its growth in the number of employees, the share of the service industry in GDP per capita decreased from 61.4% to 52.4% while that of the manufacturing industry in GDP considerably grew from 7.9% to 32.4%. As a result, the productivity of manufacturing has surpassed that of service industry since 1995, enlarging the gap between both industries. The low productivity of the service industry accompanied with the increase in labour force participation has produced a fall in real wages in the service industry. Since 1999, real wages in manufacturing has acceded that in service (G. I. Park and Woo, 2007). In particular, personal services,⁴⁶ where the three women have been working, are one of the lowest-income industries whose average wages are lower than manufacturing (Y. S. Kim, 2006: 110-111). Personal services are dominated by less educated women. In 2005, 80% of the employees were educated less than high school and women made up 59% of the employees in personal services (S.-G. Lee and Kim, 2010: 16).

⁴⁴ Following Y-S. Kim (2006: 112), service industry includes all the rest industries, except goods-producing sectors such as agriculture and fishery, mining, manufacturing, electronics/gas/ water supply, and the construction industry. According to her, between 1970 and 2005, the share of the employees in service industry doubled from 32.1% to 65.2% while that in manufacturing reached at its peak (27.8%) in 1989 and had steadily reduced to 18.5% in 2005.

⁴⁵ In 2008, the service sector provided most employment, accounting 67.3% of all employment (Park and Choi, 2011). Compared to the UK and UK, where services account for over 80% (Nixon, 2009), this rate is relatively low but it is significant rise of service sector in South Korea, up from 32.4% in the late 1970s (J.-W. Park and Choi, 2011).

⁴⁶ According to the OECD(2000: 83), personal services provide final consumption for households and are characterised by direct contact between the consumer and the service provider. Four major sub groups are hotels, bars, and restaurants; recreation, amusements and cultural services; domestic services; other personal services.

3 THREE WOMEN'S STORIES

3.1 Yurim (25), a scooter rider

Even if I graduated a brilliant university, I would make coffee and be getting sexually harrassed unless I were a daughter of the boss. (hahaha) I can't endure it. (Yurim, 25)

When I first met her, Yurim (her real name, 25)⁴⁷ was working at a call centre as a full-timer. One of my university colleagues introduced her to me. Yurim was learning English from the colleague every Sunday to get a IELTS and then apply to an Austrailian university. Yurim used to perform in a band in the Hongdae area and my colleague was a fan and once manager of the band. The first interview was conducted at a university seminar room after her English tutorial in May 2008. I accompanied by my colleague. After a two-hour formal interview focusing on her work experience at a call centre, Yurim and I had a beer at a bar and shared a more informal interview about her personal stories. Later, in July 2008, by her introduction, I visited the call center where she was working and interviewed the male manager of the call center. Soon after I returned to the UK, Yurim quit the job in October 2008 and did not get a job until she went to Australia in June 2009. Before she went to Australia, I had an additional online interview with her in April 2009. After she moved to Australia, she occasionally emailed me, telling me about her study abroad. The following story draws on all of these conversations.

3.1.1 *Life trajectory*

Yurim gave me a very strong first impression with her contradictory characteristics. On the one hand, she looked very rebellious. When I first met her, she came to the

⁴⁷In the first individual interview, when I let her know that her name would be anonymous, Yurim told me that she was proud of her life to be quoted by her name. Following her request, I use her real name in the thesis.

interview place by scooter, wearing large squared black glasses in a boxy T-shirt and half pants. She had thirteen holes in both ears, a tattoo on her back and she was a heavy smoker and drinker. In contrast to her look, her attitude and way of speaking were really polite and feminine. Soon after we sat around the table, she started to do the interview by saying, ‘how can I help you?’

Yurim had been living in the end of northern part of Seoul with her parents and a younger sister. Her father is a self-made man running a construction company and her mother is a housewife whose favourite activity is to buy things via home shopping channels. As the eldest, she has grown up with adequate financial support from her parents. Her parents sent Yurim to a private elementary school for a better education, whose tuition fee was as much expensive as that of university. Unlike ordinary elementary schools, it had a special school uniform and operated a school bus, which distinguished these students from others. However, Yurim recalled the school period as a miserable time which ‘left a deep trauma’ with her, experiencing a big gap with other students from a wealthy family with parents who were mostly professionals at the high-end of the labour market, such as doctors, professors, judges, and prosecutors.

Yurim: One day I was invited to a birthday party. To my surprise, it was being held at a hotel. I was even given a present. [...] When I once visited a friend, her mother asked me if my mother played golf. Coming back home, I asked to my mother. My mother answered, “Golf? I can play a badminton though.” I felt so embarrassed with my parents. [...] In school, friends were not like friends. There was an invisible wall between friends. In the final year of elementary school, other students were already studying high school textbooks. No matter how beautiful the weather was, they only studied. I couldn’t tolerate it.

In addition, Yurim, told me some stories to show how badly teachers treated her:

Yurim: Being marked as a delinquent, I was often scolded by teachers in front of other students. A teacher tore my drawing into pieces and another made fun of me for a little belated payment of an extra activity fee.

Yurim believes that teachers hated her because her family was not rich enough compared to others. To avoid similar experiences, she ‘begged’ her parents to let her go to a public middle school. In contrast to her elementary school hood, Yurim described her middle school hood with nostalgia:

Yurim: One of my friends was living in a single room with all her four family members together. Her family was running a rice cake store. Whenever we visited, her mother made us a rice cake, which was really delicious. I felt jealous of her family and realised the value of living together. Since then, living together and friendship have become the most important value for me in my life.

Nonetheless, her troubles with teachers seemed to continue during middle school hood:

Yurim: Whenever a teacher annoyed me, I punched a hole on my ear. Thus I have thirteen holes on my ears.

In her final year of middle school, according to Yurim, she gained ‘emancipation’ in the middle of her final examination and gave up studying:

Yurim: I did study hard for the final exam but only to find myself still confused during the exam. I hated it. ... It’s okay if I fail when I do not study hard, but it’s really annoying if I fail even though I study hard. Since then, I decided to do only what I like to do because I thought I would fail anyway in the exam. In high school, I did not even buy a textbook.

She advanced to a general high school but instead of studying for university, she took a ‘*jikoeptan*’ (vocational class). *Jikoeptan* is a programme that provides students in general high school with a chance to learn vocational skills. It was newly launched in 2001 as part of a government policy to increase the employment rate. Participating in the programme, Yurim went to the general high school only on Monday and commuted to another private institution in order to receive vocational classes for the rest of the weekdays. Therefore, it was almost the same as transferring to another vocational school. Yurim showed a high level of satisfaction with the vocational institution:

Yurim: I loved my life at the school, studying practical music. Teachers in the vocational school were also nice..I usually went to school very early because I hated to hear teachers cursing at us. One day, I was sick and late for school. I went to school ready to be dammed, but my teacher asked me if I was sick first. I was so moved.

[I: Why did you choose to study practical music?]

Yurim: Umm.. Do you want a frank answer? (a laughter) Umm. My official answer was 'I used to learn a lot of music with great interest since I was a child. Music is everything to me'. However, to be honest, I am not that patient enough to keep on doing one thing. I have learned many things. Skating for six years, swimming for four years, fine art for one year, photography for two years etc. I too received very expensive private tutorials for studying. Music was the last one that I chose to do. I learned how to play a drum in a private institution and found it fun.

In the school, she formed a band with other students studying practical music, and began to perform in the Hongdae area (she played a drum in the band). Then, she entered into a newly established vocational university for practical music. The school did not require any formal score on the university entrance examination, so all of her twenty-four high school mates advanced to the school.

3.1.2 *Work trajectory: working at a call centre*

Playing a drum at a club, Yurim did various *albas* in bars, restaurants, and clubs. Given full financial support from her parents, Yurim did the *albas* to make extra money for drinking with friends. Whenever she received unfair treatment in her work place, she argued against it and quit without hesitation, and thus most *albas* ended within a month.

Yurim: Most people don't dare to say anything to their boss when they got unfair treatment. But, due to my bad temper, I said whatever I wanted to.

At the aged 22, following a group of her close friends from the vocational school, Yurim impulsively went to Australia with a working holiday visa. It was the first time for her to live by herself without her parents' support. Sharing a flat with her four friends, she stayed in Australia for one and a half years working on a farm, and in

restaurants and bars. Yurim described the period in a very positive way, receiving proper treatment and recognition as a good worker, which was impossible in Korea:

Yurim: When I worked there, I was highly evaluated and promoted as much as I worked hard. For example, when I worked in a bar, I was able to become a manager just within six months. It is impossible for me, as a high school graduate, in Korea. [...] In addition... one day, when I was off, the manager of the bar called me and asked if I could work on the day, keeping saying 'sorry'. In Korea, employees should work whenever they are called without saying anything...

Nonetheless, the work did not seem entirely good as Yurim described. Working in the bar in Australia, she always wore contact lens to make a better look, which caused a severe problem in her eyes. Thus, Yurim had to leave her work and come back to Korea in order to treat her eye problem. After returning from Australia, Yurim dropped out of her university, which 'really sucked'. Instead, Yurim began to prepare for migrating to Australia.

Yurim: Music was the center of my life, but now my main purpose is to live the rest of my life in Australia. Through living in Australia, I realized that there is *a better life* outside of Korea. [...] To be honest, I would love to get a job here (in Korea). I'd love to belong somewhere and get recognition in the place. I think I could work brilliantly, but this is just a dream far from reality. First of all, I am not eligible to apply for a decent job. I too think it is ridiculous, but if I were an employer, I would do so... I wouldn't feel embarrassed even if I made coffee working as an office clerk. However, I don't think I could get recognition there. If I proposed a brilliant idea, it would become my boss's idea, not mine, and he would be the person, not me, who gets promotion due to the idea. That's why I want to go to Australia, where I can get recognition. (*My emphasis*)

As a first step for getting Australian citizenship, she was planning to get a university degree from an Australian university, which would make her eligible to apply for Australian citizenship. That was why she was preparing for the IELTS.

In addition, although her parents promised to pay for the entire cost of studying abroad ('My parents told me this is the last chance they give me'), she was saving some money by herself, working at a call centre. The call centre was for a surrogate driver

service (*daeriunjeon*).⁴⁸ Yurim had worked there as a part-timer for five months in 2005 before she went to Australia. According to Yurim, the company achieved great growth in three years, developing from a small-sized company with only five call receptionists to one of the top five companies in the surrogate driver service industry, with forty receptionists and more than a thousand drivers available. The surrogate driver service company consisted of a main office, a call centre and several local offices for the drivers. I visited the call centre in July 2008.

The call centre was located in a northern part of Seoul. Listening to Yurim's explanation, I imagined a rather big-size company in a new building before I visited the centre. Unlike my expectation, the centre looked like a small sized private library with desks in two rows, occupying part of the third floor of an old building. In addition, the way of operating the service and labour force looked very strange to me. Although surrogate drivers are the essential labour force of the company, a thousand drivers were not employed by the company but were working as 'self-employers' using the network service of the company. It seemed a typical case of 'illegal indirect employment'. According to Yurim, there was lack of laws to properly regulate the new surrogate driver service industry. According to the manager of the centre who I interviewed, only workers in the main office were regularly employed and most of workers in the call centre were temporarily employed. The male manager was the only regular worker in the call centre.

The whole process of the service was like this: a client calls the center to use the service, and a receptionist receives the call and inputs the order into the service network,

⁴⁸ In South Korea, the surrogate driver service industry has rapidly grown through 2000s. It first emerged around 1997, began to grow during the IMF era, and rapidly expanded in the mid-2000s when police were cracking down on drunk drivers. In 2008, the number of surrogate driver service companies reached more than 16000 and the market volume was estimated to be more than 3 billion a year. In 2010, the number of employees in the industry is estimated to reach over 0.12 million, including 0.1 million of drivers, and more than 0.4 millions of people are using the service a day.

including information about the client's current location, destination and the service fare. Then, the order appears on the service network and a surrogate driver clicks the order using his own digital device such as a mobile phone or PDA, and moves to the client's location and calls the client on the spot. After driving the client's car to the destination, the driver gets paid on the spot directly from the client. As such, the company is not an employer but a service provider to the surrogate drivers. The drivers monthly pay for the network service and car insurance to the company. In addition, whenever a driver receives an order from the network, 20% of the service fare is automatically charged for commission fee by the company. Of course, there is no benefit from the company. Drivers should pay all the transportation fares to move to the client and the digital device fares.

The surrogate driver service company had a clear occupational segregation by gender. Most clients were male; all call receptionists were females; all the drivers were males with a few exceptional female drivers. Within the call centre, the manager was a male regular worker and female receptionists were temporary workers. Out of forty receptionists, 38 were *albas* and only two of them were regular workers. According to the manager, most clients were using the service at night when they were drunk and thus the centre were the busiest between 10pm to 2am. *Albas* were working for 4 or 5 hours per day during the busiest time of the call centre. According to Yurim, most *albas* were housewives living near the centre, who wanted to make some extra money for their children during their 'free time'. *Albas* were averagely paid 5,000 won (USD 5) per hour. According to Yurim, during the peak time (between 10pm and 1am), they were covering more than a thousand calls, receiving 200 calls each on average (the experienced receive up to 400 calls). In the centre, Yurim was one of two full timers monthly paid, who were working in turns: one covers daytime and the other covers the

night time. Yurim was in charge of nighttime, working from 10pm to 7am from Monday through Saturday. Playing a role of a sub-manager, she was covering most complaining calls from customers in addition to incoming calls. Her wage started from 1,000,000 won (USD 1000) and increased to 1,100,000 won in three months, and later became 1,200,000 according to Yurim's request.

To borrow the manager's word, the call centre plays a role of a 'broker' between the drivers and clients. According to him, 'the most critical element for the receptionists is the 'sweet voice''. 'We don't see appearance at all', he added proudly. According to Yurim, because women receptionists are servicing drunken men, there are severe abuses and sexual harassments by customers.

Yurim: Out of 2000 calls, 200 calls are such calls... because most customers are drunk they talk roughly. Some people start to speak, saying "hey, bitch" or "Let's have sex." A man once asked me to call a woman. So I said back to him, "Call your wife" (a laughter). Sexual perverts know that all receptionists are women. ... I often feel they look down on women per se.

One of the main issues in relation to call centre work is electronic surveillance through monitoring system. The call centre where Yurim was working was an interesting case in that it was not operating any recording or monitoring system but operating an old surveillance system by a manager. 'It costs a lot. Since the call centre is very small space, I can hear all of them', the manager said. It seemed to have a contradictory impact on the working condition of the receptionists. On the one hand, without recording system, it is hard to prove clients' sexual abuses and harassments. On the other hand, the absence of the recording system seemed to allow a little room for receptionists to react against the bad customers, as Yurim said:

Yurim: In principle, it is not allowed for receptionists to use swear words in the call centre. But, in case of sexual perverts, I just hang up or respond with curses. An advertisement describes a telemarketer, who talks to a customer, "Thank you, I will connect you to a support team"

and then picks up the phone again and say, “Hello, this is a support team. I will connect you to the claim centre.” (a laugh) We did the same thing. (laughter) When a bad customer calls, we hang up, saying “I will connect you to a person in charge.” (laughter) Sometimes, I secretly swear back to those people. I educated new workers never to use any bad language whatever customers say. However, if a customer goes too far, I get the call and shout back all kinds of abuse to the client.

As a full time worker, Yurim was also in charge of dealing with customers’ claims. To make other receptionists receive as many order calls as possible, all customer claims were handed over to Yurim first and then went to the male manager when Yurim found it hard to deal with.

Yurim: In the case of the claiming calls, I never use bad words back. I should listen to whatever they say. I try to understand why they swear at me. They are angry because they were passed over without being heard. They keep calling to be heard. I just listen to them no matter how long it takes, for ten minutes, one hour, or two hours. An insistent person kept calling for six hours.

[I: What do they complain about?]

Yurim: When a driver doesn’t come, when a driver isn’t courteous enough, when they pay more than what they expected, etc. It is quite usual for customers to hit drivers or drivers to hit customers. It’s really funny. (laughter). When a driver reports a customer who beat him, we register the customer on the black list and block his calls afterwards.

Echoing Nixon’s research on the men’s attitude to entry-level service work (Nixon, 2009), the men show more resistance to ‘eating shit’ and difficulty in controlling their emotional and physical reactions to customers. Between them, female receptionists were ‘eating shit’ not only from customers but also from the drivers. By doing so, receptionists seem to play a role absorbing both groups’ stress and negative emotions.

3.1.3 *A reversed everyday life*

What Yurim found most difficult in her job was not sexual harassment but the reversed life pattern:

Yurim: In the beginning, my plan was to study during daytime and work at night. I thought I could use daytime for my self if I worked at night, but I didn't work at all. [...] I start work at 10 pm and leave at 7am after staying all night in work place. It is around 8 o'clock in the morning when I come back home. After having some food, I go to bed. Then I wake up at 8 in the evening, take a shower, and go to work. Living like that has blurred my sense of time, date, and weather. I go to work on Friday and come back on Saturday. So, when someone says it's Friday, I think as if it were Saturday.

Owing to her different time concept, whenever I made appointment with Yurim, we had to check out several times to ensure if we were referring to the same day. It was like talking to someone living in another country with a different time zone. For instance, Sunday evenings were the only 'off time' in the call centre because people do not drink that much on Sunday evenings. Therefore, we attempted to meet up on Sunday evening, which Yurim referred to as Monday. In fact, she was living in a different time zone with 12 hours time difference: she got up and went to work when most people leave work and come back home; she left work and came back home when most people get up and go to work.

Yurim: Sleeping during daytime is really stressful to me. No matter how heavy the curtains I use, I can't block the sunshine completely. I feel like I haven't slept at all, feeling tired all the time. When I am sick, I have to go to hospital right after work and come home around at 2 or 3 pm. (And go to work at 8 pm and stay all night until the morning of the next day) In that case, I can't have a proper sleep for two days.

In addition, this reversed pattern of life had a profound impact on her intimate relationship with family and friends.

Yurim: It is a pity that I don't have time to communicate with my family or friends. Other family members go out when I return to home and they come back home when I go to work. It is also difficult to meet my friends. When I have some time to chat at around 3 am, they are asleep. I am sleeping during daytime so that I can't answer any calls. Furthermore, I can't take a day off on holidays because it's the busiest time in the call centre. [...] We (Yurim and her friends) often go for a drink at 11 pm and it lasts until 3 or 4 am. At the beginning my friends called me to join for drinks but don't contact me any more. I became isolated from my friends... All I did was work in the call centre with little interaction or

conversation. In doing so, I became to get used to playing alone by playing a computer game, watching movies, and web surfing when there were less calls after 3 am.

In the above account, interestingly, despite the huge volume of interactive service work in the call centre, Yurim describes her call centre work as something with ‘little interaction or conversation’ with people. According to Yurim, receptionists hardly interact with each other. There was little time to talk to other receptionists since they had to receive the coming calls without break. Moreover, other receptionists and the manager left work around 2 am. Yurim was staying all night alone until 7 am, handling occasional incoming calls. Yurim spent the time searching the Internet or doing online games after completing some paper work for the complaints. Thus, Yurim explained her work as something isolated with a computer, which had even changed her personality itself:

Yurim: I used to love to go out with friends and hate to stay at home. So many things to do outside... I used to go out to see flowers in spring, have beer near a riverside in summer, and go to the mountains to enjoy the colored leaves in autumn. That’s ‘real’ me. To me, home was a place just for sleeping. However, after working at the call centre, my life has become upside-down. ... The more and more I communicate only with computers, I feel uncomfortable to meet friends since they provoke me. So I just keep sleeping and playing with the computer at home. I think I’ve got used to living that way, so I’ve turned into a person who doesn’t go out.

Yurim expressed contradictory feelings about her living at the moment.

Yurim: I would like to erase the 25th year of my life. It’s not like me at all. I am working only for money, which is not how I’ve lived so far. All I did is work and sleep. However, on the other hand, I feel relieved to realize that I too could live in the way other people live [...] To be honest, I don’t know yet what I want to do in the end. However, I would like to live freely. That’s my dream. For me, it doesn’t mean to live without responsibility or caring for others. It means to live making my own decisions. I am ok with working in the call centre all night because it is my decision to endure the work. It should be ‘me’, not others, who decide what to do.

In October 2008, Yurim decided to leave the job in the end. In the additional online messenger interview in April 2009, Yurim reflected on the reason for leaving the job:

Yurim: So much stress... I saw I was going crazy. It's hard to control my anger. Even right after I was severely abused by a customer, I had to nicely receive the following call. There was no time to feel anger between calls. I became blunt more and more to those abuses and situations, which was very scary.

She found herself to pick a fight with her family or friends in order to express her emotions, which she had to suppress in work place.

Yurim: One morning after I returned home from work, I had a big fight with my mom and she came into my room banging the door. On coming into my room, I began to giggle because I released my suppressed stress anyway. I felt bad after fighting and hurting others, but yelling to others seemed to relieve my stress a little because I was not able to do it in my work place. Going on the computer after the fight with my mom, I realised I was getting mad. It was really weird to see me smiling at a mirror and giggling watching a movie when I was supposed to feel sad. I quit the job that day.

Even after quitting the call centre, her reversed pattern of life continued for a while. She was staying up all night until 7 am, using her computer web surfing, playing games, reading comic books or watching movies.

3.2 Joowha (25), a beautician

Since I was very young, I've longed to leave Korea.... I have so many bad memories here (in Korea). ... I'd like to study more, learn English, and earn money. People say that there are many chances to make good money there. (Joowha, 25)

Joowha (not her real name, her preferred pseudonym) is one of Yurim's close friends and was working as a part-timer at the call centre. When I asked Yurim to introduce her friends who were doing *alba*, Yurim suggested Joowha, saying that 'she is the friend I respect most. She has been making a living by herself.'

The first interview with her was conducted on a Sunday evening in May 2008. At the moment, Joowha was working with two jobs: as a full timer in a music source company from Monday to Friday; as a part timer at the call centre from Friday evening to Sunday morning. Thus, for her, Sunday evenings were the only free time when she was off. Joowha loved to socialise with her friends on Sunday evenings, eating out at a fancy restaurant or going to movie. The interview was conducted as part of it, being conducted at a fancy Italian restaurant in *Itaewon*, having dinner and drinking and smoking together. Yurim planned to meet up but could not make it. *Itaewon* is one of the spots Joowha loves in Seoul. Located near the US Army Headquarters, the area was originally formed as a shopping and entertaining area mainly for US soldiers. More recently, the area has become one of the most famous tourist spots in Seoul with various foreign cuisine restaurants and many foreigners hanging around. The area is also one of the hottest spots for clubbing among young people. Joowha used to work a restaurant in the area and also loved to come to the area for shopping and clubbing. Sitting in our table, Joowha said, ‘I like an exotic place like *Itaewon* because I feel as if I were not in Korea.’

Joowha was living by herself in the northern part of Seoul. In contrast to Yurim, Joowha has a very feminine look with a thin body and long hair, speaking in a very polite manner. My contact with her has lasted after the fieldwork (even until now in 2015). However, the following story mainly depends on the interview and more informal conversations and online contacts during the fieldwork in Seoul.

3.2.1 *Life trajectory*

Joowha and Yurim met in middle school and advanced to the same high school. In high school, Joowha also took the vocational programme, learning hairstyling.

Joowha: I didn't study well and my family was too poor to afford university. I thought it would be better to earn money as soon as possible. I heard hairstyling was the easiest way for women to get a job. So I planned to learn hairstyling skill and get a job at a salon.

Joowha's parents were divorced when she was a child. After the divorce, Joowha began to live with her mother and brother. While she maintained a good relationship with her father, she had many troubles in the relationship with her mother and brother.

According to Yurim, it was not uncommon for Joowha to be beaten by her brother.

Joowha: I longed to live by myself for a long time. Since my parents got divorced when I was a child, I spent most time at home by myself. I was living with my mom and brother, but I thought living alone would be much better because I didn't have a good relationship with them. [Why?] My mom hates my father so she dislikes my keeping in touch with father. I often had a fight with mom and then my brother beat me.

Avoiding the uncomfortable relations with them, she began to live by herself as soon as she graduated from high school. Since then, she had hardly contacted her mother and brother. Her father, who remarried and was living with his new wife, helped Joowha to rent a house near where he lived. Since then Joowha had been making her living in her own:

Joowha: I wanted to get a job right after graduating from high school, but my father insisted I should go to university to be treated as a human in our society.

Following his advice, Joowha took a vocational university degree course for cosmetic treatment using the Academic Credit Bank System (See 3.2.1 in CH 2).

3.2.2 *Work trajectory: Juggling with two jobs*

To make a living and pay her tuition fees, Joowha had been doing various *albas* in many places such as a bar, 24-hour convenient store, theatre, hair salon, call centre, etc.

In the second year of her university, she took a break and worked in a theatre for one year to save money to pay her tuition fee. In the theatre, she worked from 9am to 9pm, being paid 900,000 won (USD 900) per month.

Joowha: I checked tickets in front of a gate. It wasn't that tough because I sat down in a chair all day long, but very tedious and time-consuming. There were often late night shows starting after 11pm in the theatre. On these days, I came back home over midnight. CCTVs were watching and recording me all the time. Through the CCTVs, supervisors could watch me if I dozed or had a bad attitude. It made me feel really bad. I heard that even the owner of the theatre could watch me at home. Convenient stores are operated in the same way: The owner hardly comes to the store, but they watch us through CCTVs if we are chatting.

Out of 900,000 won, she saved 400,000 won, spending 200,000 won for rent, 100,000 won for bills, 200,000 for living cost. To save money, she used free cosmetics samples. 'Because I didn't have time to go out for fun, there was nothing to spend money on.'

After she completed the first semester of her third year, she did not need to attend offline classes any more. She completed the third year by gaining a certificate as a colourist who mixes colours for interior designers or hairstylists. Then, during the final year, she got the rest of her credits by taking 'cyber-class' via the Internet. Attending virtual classes, she began to work as a full timer in a hair clinic salon for eleven hours a day (from 9am to 8pm or 10am to 9pm). She was paid 1,200,000 won a month. The reason she decided to work in the hair clinic was because of its relatively high pay. According to Joowha, the hair clinic service pays much better than other jobs in the area, which her friends were doing:

Joowha: Workers in a beauty salon get paid really low. They get paid only 300,000-400,000 won per month. Stylists also get paid really low. Besides, they have to move a lot, carrying heavy clothes at their work. But, they have to pay all the transportation on their own. My friend gets paid 400,000 per month. Once they become freelancers, they can earn some money, but it takes more than 6 years to become a freelancer.

Her job was to give hair treatment service to people with hair loss problem. The service is quite expensive, mostly serving male clients.

Joowha: I liked talking with people during the service. Most people came to the salon because they were getting bald. I washed their hair and gave some hair treatment. Most clients were men. People who have hair loss tend to avoid making eye contact with others. I felt proud of my job when they began to open their mind, talking about their life. We talked a lot during the service because there were just two of us in a small space.

Joowha felt responsibility for her clients, which gave her a feeling of guilt when the result of the treatment was not good enough.

Joowha: I felt like I were cheating my clients. It is not easy to stop or recover from hair loss. When a client complained about the result, I would say that it would get better within another three months, but nothing improves in three months despite the high price of the service. It is really expensive.⁴⁹ [...] People have high expectation when they pay that much, but the result is not good... so they complain. Then, we keep lying, saying that it would get better soon. I felt really sorry for them. Once I realised that I was cheating people, I didn't want to keep doing the job anymore. I was very distressed with the doubt about my job, so I quit.

After one-year of work, she quit the job and then began to work in the call centre by Yurim's introduction in November 2007.

Joowha: Frankly speaking, it is really annoying! Drunken people often fight with drivers. When there is a trouble between them, receptionists in the call centre are blamed by both of them. In the beginning, I didn't understand why Yurim had been doing the job, but I found it more comfortable than other jobs because it doesn't include physical labour or facial interaction with people. What I have to do is use a computer sitting in a chair. It is not that hard, except for the huge stress. (...) We cannot respond properly because we cannot say a bad word. What we can do is just listen. A man once told me, "I want to have a sex with you". I just say, "I am going to hang up." Most receptionists are married women. They seem much more tolerant with those things than young women. However, this job pays more and is easier than serving in a restaurant.

⁴⁹ According to Joowha, to receive the treatment once a week for one month, a client should pay about 1,000,000 won, which is as much as Joowha's monthly payment. Since the service sells three months or six months package, a client having the service for six month would pay up to 6,000,000 won, which is a huge amount of money for Joowha.

In January 2008, Joowha finally graduated from her university and she got a job as a full time worker in a music source registration company in February 2008. She found the job via the Internet. The company has two teams. One is making a database of music sources; the other is monitoring whether a piece of music is being used without permission. Joowha was working in the monitor team with other five people.

Joowha: There are a lot of mp3 music files on the Internet. Computers search and delete them to prevent people from downloading it for free from the Internet. Computers automatically search music but there are many errors. I correct the errors. To my surprise, computers fail a lot.

The job is not that hard but the payment is too low to afford her living. Thus, she kept her *alba* at the call centre. When I first met Joowha in May 2008, she was juggling with two jobs. During weekdays, she was doing the music source company work from 9am to 7pm. Then, she was working at the call centre from 10 pm on Friday night to 7 am on Saturday, staying all night. That means she was working almost 24 hours without sleeping from Friday morning to Saturday morning. After taking a nap, she worked from Saturday night until 7 am on Sunday. Sunday evening was the only time when she could meet people. It was also Sunday evening when I met her.

Joowha: Today also I worked until 7am and had some sleep and came to see you. It's hard but good when I get paid. Living conditions drive me that way. I'd love to have just one job, too. I am not that greedy but my life makes me so because I need money... so I can't help it. ... Wages seem to become smaller and smaller while those people in a higher position get higher and higher. Contract employees are treated like *albas*. I heard people in our country get paid far less than people in other countries.

For the two jobs, she was earning 1,250,000 won in total: 950,000 won from her full time job and 300,000 won from her *alba* at the call centre.

3.2.3 *Dreaming of going abroad*

While Yurim formed a group of friends studying practical music, Joowha formed a different group of female friends who studied fashion, cosmetics and beauty together in high school and college. One was a stylist, another was working in a hair salon, and the other was preparing for an examination to be a nurse who restores hair.

Joowha: I like to go to see a movie and to have a meal at a fancy restaurant with my friends. I try to meet them at least once a month, but it is hard to arrange a time because we are all working.

Instead, Joowha was usually spending her free time alone at home:

Joowha: During weekdays, I usually come back home right after work and make dinner for myself. I love to cook. After dinner, I watch TV or go on the computers.

Her favourite TV channel is *ON STYLE*, a Korean cable channel focused on fashion and beauty targeting young women. In the channel, Joowha enjoyed watching some beauty related American reality shows such as *American Top Model* and *Swan*:

Joowha: Recently so many people are doing plastic surgery. Some of my friends have done it, too. Having an eye-lid surgery has become a basic thing to do. One of them even had breast surgery. I realized the value of the surgery as I've watched them become more beautiful and confident. In addition, it would be helpful for them to make a boyfriend. However, I am scared of doing it. If I had money, I'd like rather travel abroad than have a plastic surgery. I'd like to travel to Europe, like England and France. Although I am not expecting that something good would happen to me, it would be great to see a new world anyway.

What she loved most is *Sex and the City*, which made her dream of living in New York:

Joowha: I love New York. It looks fantastic in *Sex and the City*. The city itself looks fun and vigorous. Various ethnic groups live together. I'd like to enjoy cultural things and go to museums. New York is full of that kind of cultural thing. I'd love to live there and experience studying abroad.

Unlike Yurim, Joowha did not seem to spend much time on her computer at home.

When she was online at home, she was looking for some information (such as a recipe) and visiting her 'cyworld mini-hompy', a popular Korean social media site.⁵⁰

Joowha: I found it very fun and useful because I can search for friends who I've lost contact with and see how other friends are living.

Her mini-hompy also displayed the scenes of her social life with friends and travelling to Shanghai with her father. On the other hand, she also found a hierarchy operating in the process of displaying and sharing intimate relationship, sometimes that gave her a feeling of left out:

Joowha: I once dated a student of Seoul National University. They (SNU students) think they should meet a woman from Ewha University or Sookmyeong University (the most privileged women's university in Korea). I don't understand it. We should meet people as they are, shouldn't we? He never introduced me to his friends or sister. After breaking up with him, in his mini-homepy, I found a picture of him with his new girl friend. I heard his new girl friend goes to Ewha. When he went out with me, he never uploaded my picture. He must have felt embarrassed with my educational background and my job.

After a long silence, she continued to talk about her dream:

Joowha: (a long silence in thoughts) I am not sure what I want to do eventually. When people ask what is my dream, I say, "I want to make a lot of money". (laughter). I'd like to earn a lot of money. I'd like to climb up to a higher position. People laugh at me when I say this. But, I believe it could come true if I wish it all the time.

[I: Why would it be good if you make a lot of money and climb up to a higher position?]

Joowha: I wish people would respect me when I made success in spite of difficulties. (a pause) It's easy for people who graduate from a good university to get on a good track. I'd like to prove that people in bad circumstances could climb up to a higher position.

⁵⁰ When I was conducting research, more than 90% of young people in their 20s were using the mini-hompy service for socialising.

Her dream was to be an hotelier in Australia. To do so, she was planning to go to Australia via a working holiday visa like Yurim did. Yurim and Joowha were planning to go to Australia together.

Joowha: Since I was very young, I've longed to leave Korea. Especially, I have thought about it a lot since my high school years. I have so many bad memories here (in Korea). I want to live my own life in a place where nobody knows me. Although I have a family here, I don't keep in touch with them at all, except my father. So I think I can leave Korea without any hesitation. I'd like to study more, learn English, and earn money. People say that there are many chances to make good money there.

3.3 Seul (25), a postfeminist

When I gain weight, I feel like I've become surplus by that amount.
(Seul, 25)

I met Seul (not her real name) through the introduction of my friend's younger brother. My friend was living with her younger brother in Seoul, and I stayed with them during my fieldwork period. After graduating from the most privileged national art school, her younger brother was writing film scripts at home. His friends from the art school were often hanging around the house, sharing their ideas on their own work. Seul was a girl friend of one of them who was also preparing to becoming a filmmaker, working as part time staff in film industry. At that time, Seul was studying how to write film scripts, and also doing *alba* as a nude model. I conducted three individual interviews with her over the period from November 2007 to April 2008 at cafes, restaurants, and bars.

The first interview was conducted at a café in Sinchon, followed by an informal conversation at a bar. I suggested meeting in the same seminar café where I conducted the *baekjo* meeting with the women of Hope Hall. However, Seul did not like the seminar café because 'it is rustic' (in her words). She used the word 'rustic' to describe something that she disliked. Instead, we met another café, which was newly launched

by a major telecommunication company as a 'cultural zone' for young people. On the third floor, the cafe provided dozens of seminar rooms equipped with two laptop computers and free drinks. It looked like a high-tech version of a seminar cafe.

Seul arrived on time. She looked very feminine and fashionable, wearing a typical trendy look among young women: leggings in black coat and boots with long hair and sparkling eye make up. We were allocated to a seminar room. In the next room, there were a group of people who were preparing for job interviews. Looking at them, Seul said, 'It must be miserable to study together to enter a company. The subjects to study must be horrible, so are people who study together.'

3.3.1 Life trajectory: in and out of the 'alternative'

Seul (25) was living with her parents and one elder brother in Ilsan, a newly developed city neighbouring Seoul. Her father is a journalist who works for one of the major Korean newspapers and her mother is a housewife and feminist, who often goes to travel by and for herself. Both of her parents are highly educated, meeting in postgraduate school when only handful of people entered postgraduate school. Seul's elder brother was serving his military duty as a public service worker, after being expelled from his university due to his poor academic score.

During the first interview, what I found most interesting was her way of speaking. She spoke very politely, but frequently used swear words like 'fucking'; she giggled a lot when she told me her bad experiences; she frequently used academic vocabularies such as discourse and sexuality. It was very interesting for me to hear her frequently using both academic vocabularies and swear words. In sum, she was 'naughty but nice', which seemed her particular way of doing feminism.

Teenagers, the horrible being

Due to her feminist mother and aunt, Seul had been exposed to feminist discourses since her childhood. 'I have been recognising myself as a feminist since when I was very young.' Seul showed many characteristics of 'postfeminist sensibility' with the entanglement of both feminist and anti-feminist themes (Gill, 2007: 149), including a double attitude toward feminism, an obsessive attention on her body, an emphasis upon individualism, choice and empowerment, and an emphasis upon consumerism. All of these seemed her ways of doing feminism as well.

Those features were well presented in her account of her high school hood. Seul found it difficult to adapt herself with high school culture and left her school in her first year. Seul explained several things she hated in her high school. Most of all, she criticised the collective culture in a conventional high school, emphasising the value of autonomous individuals:

Seul: I hated to get up early and to wear the school uniform... I have hated such a thing since my childhood. [...] In high school, being alone is very risky. Staying with others is safe. ... If I were alone, others would think me strange. And if they thought me so, I would become a strange person. [...] People follow the psychology of a crowd because they are not self-assured enough (a laughter). High school girls are more likely to do so... Teenagers... I hated them.

In particular, she showed her strong hostility against sexual harassment prevalent in high school culture.

Seul: I hated that atmosphere. Students were so powerless and teachers were perverts. When a teacher told a story about sexually abusing girls, boys enjoyed it and girls ignored as if it's not their business (a big laugh). For example, if something like Ivy accident happened, girls would say, "How could she do so?" (laughter) But, why isn't it not their business? It is their business (a big laughter).

The *Ivy* accident is a typical case of sex video file scandals of female celebrities on the Internet.⁵¹ *Ivy* is a Korean female idol star who gained huge popularity with her sex appeal. The bottom line of the story is that *Ivy* wanted to break up with her boyfriend and her boyfriend threatened *Ivy* with a video clip of sexual intercourse between them. *Ivy* accused him of threatening her. Although *Ivy* was a victim of the accident, she was largely abused in the Internet for her liberal sexual behavior and the presence of her video clip itself became a main focus of the accident. In the end, *Ivy* left all work as a commercial model and singer, being marked as a 'whore'. The accident shows a double attitude of the dominant media culture toward 'sexy female celebrity'. In spite of the emphasis of the sexiness of young female celebrities, they are expected to remain sexually naïve in their real life. *Seul* seemed to identify herself with *Ivy* based on her personal experience in high school.

Seul: I wanted to be distinctive and I actively came on to boys I liked (a big laugh). I heard there were a lot of bad rumours about me. "She is a whore." Actually I was a virgin at the time but what is important is the image not reality. They (high school girls) are young but very conservative, speaking ill of each other behind their backs. If a girl met a man, they called her a "hooker." They might be jealous of others' experience because they didn't have any (sexual) experience. So I said, "If you want, fuck anyone you want" (a big laughter). Boys are as conservative as girls. (...)

In the above two extracts, *Seul* showed her clear feminist consciousness. First, she emphasized the personal as the political, assuming women as a single group who are sharing a vulnerable position in relation to sexual harassment and even arguing the need of solidarity among women. Second, she deliberately performed against femininity as a passive and muted object of the male gaze. Her performance of sexually empowered

51 For example, in 1999, Oh Hyunkeong, an actress, had to stop all work after her manager spread their sex video in the Internet. In 2000, Baek Jiyung, who was then top female singer, had to retire after her ex-manager spread a video clip in the Internet that recorded their sexual intercourse without her permission. Their videos were seen by numerous people and were the most common topic at that time. In addition, Lee Taeran, an actress, reported that her manager had been exploiting her income, threatening her with a similar video clip.

femininity is also against the conventional femininity imposed on female adolescents in relation to sexuality. However, her performance as a sexually emancipated girl seemed to give her a risk in her material life as shown in the above extract. She was marked as a whore not only by boys but also girls. Furthermore, she seemed to have experienced ‘date rape’ even though she did not recognise it at that moment. ‘The experience ruined my sex life as a teenager. I wasn’t able to recover until I was 21.’

Alternative as ugly

After she left her high school, Seul joined a centre for ‘alternative education’. In the mid-1990s, South Korea saw a boom of ‘alternative education’. Criticising the existing formal education system, in the early 1990s, the alternative education movement was organized by ‘progressive’ teachers, scholars, and activists in the civic sector, forming alternative kindergartens, elementary and secondary schools, and special schools for run-away students. One of the pioneering groups was called ‘another culture’, founded by a feminist cultural anthropologist, which formed ‘alternative culture movement’ in the 1990s, criticizing authoritarian and patriarchal Korean society.⁵² The Korean alternative education groups commonly pursue the formation of free, autonomous, communal, and eco-friendly life, following the values of the American alternative education movement in 1970s (H. J. Kim, 2006: 35-38). The alternative education

⁵² The mainstream media also positively introduced alternative education schools and created much attention. (Nam, 2009: 119). According to H. J. Kim (2006), the alternative education movement achieved unparalleled success in education movement history by forming an alliance of various actors such as teachers, scholars, social activists, journalists, and the government. In 1995, various civic groups formed an association for alternative education and the first full time alternative secondary school, *Gandhi School*, opened in 1997. The number of kindergartens operated by the communal childcare cooperative grew up to 30 in the end of 1990s. Moreover, the government also began to actively play a major role in alternative education, allowing setting up a ‘specialized high school’ in 1998 and making an alternative education law in 2005 (ibid: 37-45). As a result, ‘alternative school’ has become a popular term referring to various types of non-traditional education.

center that Seul joined was one of them. The centre was made by *Mindele* (dandelion), one of the earliest and representative alternative education movement groups.

When she decided to drop out of her high school, her father agreed with her decision because her father also disliked the oppressive Korean school culture. At first, he wanted to send her to study abroad for her better future. When she left her school in 1999, there was a boom of sending children to study abroad in middle or high school among middle class families (see 4.4 in CH 2). However, Seul did not want to study abroad. Instead, her parents introduced Seul to the ‘alternative education centre’ for high school dropouts.

Seul: A number of students left school at that time. Most of them did so in order to get a better position in entering a privileged university. [...] So many friends of mine left school and went abroad, but most of them returned to Korea in one year. [...] My parents also planned to send me to a public school in America. A lot of package products (for American public schooling) were flooding out. But I hated the idea. If I went to a public school in America, I would have to study again with stupid students there. I also hated studying English. Most of all, the world outside of school was totally different from inside school. I did love the environment that I chose at that time.

Seul seemed to have had a very satisfactory period in the alternative education center. ‘I met friends who are the most brilliant persons that I’ve ever met.’ During this period, a left wing newspaper reported her case as a good example for alternatives to follow because she left high school but did not try to enter a good university. Seul wrote essays criticising oppressive high school culture based on her personal experience for an alternative education magazine and sometimes appeared on TV shows to talk about educational issues. Later, following her teacher’s advice in the centre, Seul advanced to an unauthorized informal ‘alternative college’, which Seul deeply regretted.

Seul: When I was 20, I went to Green College in a rural area and studied doing farm work. It was kind of mixing eco-ism with feminism. As I left high school, I went to the school with ideal thought but it turned out a worthless trial. At the school, I became only fat, ugly, and rustic without

gaining anything worthy. It was a completely horrible mistake for me to decide to go to the school instead of wearing pretty clothes and shoes.

What was interesting to me was her comparison of being alternative with 'being ugly'.

To Seul, the period at Green College was when she lost 'the right to be beautiful' (Lazar, 2013). This reveals the critical gap between the previous generation of feminists and postfeminists in relation to beauty practice. According to Lazar, for more traditional feminists, normative beauty practices are 'oppressive' upon women generally because they are driven by beauty industry 'promoting unhealthy body image obsession and potentially harmful beauty procedures.' In contrast, for post feminists, beauty practices are 'enjoyable, self-chosen and skilled feminine pursuits' and possession of a 'sexy body' is a key source of femininity and empowerment (Lazar, 2013: 37).

The gap in the perception of a 'sexy body' seemed to form a conflict between the older feminists and Seul. Seul performed her beauty as a source of power, creating some scandals with boys, but her teachers considered it dangerous.

Seul: People talked a lot about my appearance. They seemed to define me as a woman who has to live in a city. I thought them so rustic. To become ugly isn't to become alternative, is it? *Mindele* (the alternative education centre) was also similar. Teachers felt uncomfortable when I hung around with boys, wearing pretty clothes. Feminist girls, so called, harshly criticised my behaviour. [...] It was a completely wrong decision. I was really stupid. I should have entered into any normal university. Owing to the experience, I become very reluctant to get along with people who call themselves as any '-ist'. They must be all ugly. (a big laughter) If they were able to enter a big company, would they live like that? (giggling)

[I: but, what you are saying sound like a feminist though.]

Seul: Yes, I am. I've thought myself as a feminist since my childhood, but I am afraid that feminists might criticize me as a *doenjangnyo* (soybean paste girl).⁵³

[I: Why would the feminists do so, you think?]

Seul: I don't know.. well... I don't know.. maybe because I dance swinging my hips in front of men? Because I often go to clubs? Because I wear these kind of clothes (pointing to her clothes)?

⁵³ See p. 6 in CH 1 for the meaning of *doenjangnyo*.

In the series of individual interviews with me, Seul consistently showed a very cynical view about pursuing an ‘alternative life’.

Seul: I’ve realised the limitation of pursuing ideal thoughts. By pursuing ideal thoughts, one could gain only self-satisfaction but nothing actually changes. [...] Alternative education is also the case. Teachers might feel good about themselves but nothing is good to the lives of their students. When they become over twenty, students have to decide whether they would get into mainstream society learning rules they hate, or become a loser (a big laughing).

After she left the Green College, she took high school qualification examinations and entered into a formal art college, studying literature and creative writing. She enjoyed the college since it had a very uncompetitive and individual culture.

Seul: It was fun. Because it was an art school, they don’t require SAT scores. Also, they were not competitive so that we learned to write a novel and poetry. Also, while people usually make a herd drinking together in other universities, we didn’t know each other until we graduated from the school. Seniors neither care nor annoy the juniors, which was comfortable to me. I came back home right after taking classes so I didn’t need to make contact with other students. Someone might think it’s not fun, but I felt very comfortable because I was worried that I might be left out once I belonged to a group.

3.3.2 *Work trajectory*

After she left the alternative college, she occasionally did several *albas* at cafes, bars and restaurants, being hourly paid 4000 won. At a bar, she worked as a full timer, paid 1,100,000 won for working between 9am and 10pm for 6 days a week. She quit the job because ‘the boss persistently came onto’ her. After she entered into the art college, she did not do any *alba* because she ‘did not want to’.

Even after she graduated the college, Seul never tried to get a formal job so far for two reasons. On the one hand, at the moment she did not need to desperately get a job for living since she was living with her parents with their full financial support. Her

father had paid all the expenses for her studying and living. On the other hand, ‘there was not a proper job for two-year college graduates,’ she said. When I met Seul, she was spending much time at home. Her mother often went travelling by herself. While her mother was away, Seul seemed to play the role of housewife, doing shopping and taking care of cats with her mother’s credit card.

[I: Have you ever applied to a general company?]

Seul: No, I haven’t because I don’t like the jobs that I am eligible to apply for. There are not many jobs for two-year college graduates. Even if I were accepted, I would quit the job soon. Thus, I would rather find another way.

Seul wants to make her life by writing. Since she joined the alternative education centre, she has been writing some articles for magazines, paid 100,000 to 50,000 won case by case. At first, she wrote for an alternative education magazine which is published by *Mindele*, the alternative education group.

Seul: I’ve been writing mainly for a newly launched community site, an alternative education magazine, and a feminist magazine. At first, I wrote mainly about what I hated in high school such as pervert teachers and school uniform. When I was asked to talk about it on TV, I did so. But, at the aged 21, one day I suddenly thought, ‘it’s not right. I was already over 20. Until when, I should talk about dropping out of high school. I am not in the age of high school students. ‘Is dropping out of high school the only thing that can define myself?’, I wondered.

After she met her current boyfriend, Seul changed her goal to become a film script writer. She wished to work together with her boyfriend, such that she could write a script and he would film it. When I first met her in 2007, she was learning how to write scripts, doing *alba* as a nude model for art school students. The job was to do a two-hour modeling once a week. She was earning about 500,000 won per month for the modeling. The job pays 35,000 won per hour, which is almost 9 times more than working at a bar. Seul seemed to enjoy the job itself:

Seul: I enjoyed being naked in front of others because it gave me a feeling of being accepted as I am. My boyfriend dislikes me doing this, but I said, “just let me do what I want to do, if you don’t have ability to make me happy. Aren’t you making a film?”

3.3.3 *Intimate relationship and going abroad*

The friends who Seul met in the alternative centre were the only persons with whom she maintained a relationship. During the interviews, Seul often mentioned one of her friends, Nayeon as an example of another way of living. Nayeon is one of the group of friends who Seul met in the alternative education centre. Nayeon also dropped out of high school and joined the centre. Because Nayeon was living nearby, Seul often met her. Initially, Seul and I planned to meet up together with Nayeon for our first interview, but Seul did not make it. Later, we tried to meet up several times but it did not work because of Nayeon’s situation. According to Seul, Nayeon is a vegan, and still refusing to get into any conventional education system.

Seul: My friend (Nayeon) also left high school. Since then, she hasn’t pursued any further institutional education, thus she remains as a middle school graduate, which makes it very difficult for her to get a job. Instead, she is making a living with her family. Because everyone in her family is a vegetarian, it is difficult for them to maintain a normal social life at work while keeping their principles. (...) In fact, I too don’t know what to do when I meet her because she doesn’t eat any kind of meat including egg, milk and cheese. Furthermore, she doesn’t eat some vegetables as well, which help to digest meat. Items are endlessly expanding. She also doesn’t drink alcohol, which makes it difficult to decide the place we can meet up and what to do. (...) Thus, her family are trying to make a living by themselves. They are earning all together. If her father is out of work, her mother and sister go to work. For example, they once made vegetarian sandwiches and sold them in the morning at a park. Isn’t it brilliant? They don’t need to try to survive in this competitive society to make a living. I envy her for having that kind of family community.

Seul admired Nayeon for making a life while following her faith and wished that she had also that kind of family community to support each other. However, Nayeon’s life did not seem that brilliant and simple. Over the period that I was interviewing Seul, Nayeon got a job at a centre for abandoned animals but it did not work well:

Seul: She (Nayeon) is not in a good condition. Since she left her job, she's become depressed to come out and talk to others. Good organizations are not necessarily good work places. Doing ordinary jobs annoy me because I feel it difficult and useless to do the job if it pays less than others. On the other hand, working in the alternative education or civic organization is also really annoying because what I do in the organization is just some chores rather than important work. If I worked at a women's organization, I would answer the phone not help other women. Or, working at the association of animal care but beating animals.

In the above extract, Seul explained her deadlocked situation in relation to employment. She distinguished an ordinary job for money from an alternative job for faith. However, to her, both are bad jobs. If she gets the former job, she will get low pay and thus feel 'useless' because the job is just for money. If she gets the latter job, she would not judge herself by the wage because the job is not for money but for faith. However, in reality, what she will do in the latter job are chores not practicing her faith. This situation seemed to make Seul and her friends feel like they were 'doing nothing' (in Seul's words).

Seul: The kids that I met in the centre were very smart and self-assured enough to have a confidence that they could live differently without following the way others do. However, for others, they are now just nothing but '*baeksu*' in their mid 20s because they do not enter a good school or have a job (a big laugh). After the age of 20, it's useless. One is trying to make a film, after graduating a great university; many of them were working as teachers in alternative schools. One of them had worked as a communal childcare teacher since she was 18. I heard she went to Germany to study but that did not work well and she came back. Now she was taking a childcare teacher course at the life education centre of a university. Many are doing nothing.

Blogging

'Love is the only thing that I've never tired of'. For her, dating seemed not only a personal thing but also a very political practice as a feminist. Like a female character in *Sex and City*, Seul had a very fashionable and feminine look and loved to buy 'pretty'

clothes and shoes, and showed a strong hostility against the passive role of women in relation to sexual behaviour.

Her characteristics were reflected in her online space. Seul had used a minihompy for a long time, uploading pictures of her daily life, but she stopped using the site:

Seul: I have uploaded many pictures with my previous boyfriends. I had more than four folders for the pictures. I don't use it anymore since a boyfriend found it.

Instead, Seul started blogging. On her blog, she wrote about her daily life. The main things that Seul was writing were two things. One is shopping. She uploaded a picture of pretty clothes and shoes that she liked. One of her most visited sites was also a shopping site. Seul loved to buy overseas products via online shopping. The second main topic is her intimate relationship. For example, Seul uploaded a picture of her and her boyfriend sitting on a bed at a motel, captioned 'Now, you're mine!' Seul's blog was attacked by strangers, calling her an 'unthoughtful *doenjangnyo* (soybean paste girl).' Since then, she closed her blog, leaving a posting: 'This is my private space but I can't write what I want. It's really fucking annoying.'

Going abroad

Since she graduated from art college, she planned to go to Latin America for experience, but changed her plan in order to maintain the relationship with her boyfriend:

Seul: I'd like to either get married with my boyfriend or go to North America in the near future. So far, I've met so many strange guys. If I break up with my boyfriend, I would probably meet another strange man again, I am afraid. Thus, I'd like to marry my current boyfriend.

Although Seul wanted to marry her boyfriend, she was worried because her boyfriend also did not have a regular job to make a living and he thought he should support his

parents. One month after the first interview, she had a one-month vacation to Thailand with her boyfriend. When we met again after her travel, she was very upset with her boyfriend and very anxious about her future. She had a big fight with her boyfriend during and after the travel. Among other things, the big issue was about Seul's plan of going abroad. She wanted to go abroad at the moment but her boyfriend did not agree. She expressed a strong feeling of frustration with her boyfriend's attitude:

Seul: Travelling can't satisfy my thirst (of going abroad). I felt frustrated on my way back to Korea. Last year, I was planning to go abroad but delayed it because he disliked it. Even after one year, he still keeps saying, 'Let's go abroad together later. (...) I feel lots of things, but my boyfriend doesn't understand my feelings at all. (...) I don't want to break up with my boyfriend though... I have broken up with ex-boyfriends when they didn't let me do what I wanted to. I decided to separate with them because I felt I couldn't do anything if I were with them. Now I am in a similar situation with my boyfriend again. (...) (crying) I am so upset because he wants me to live according to his plan. I feel like I'm being betrayed. I never disagree with his making a film, even though he can't make enough money to live with it, because I know he loves it. He also knows how much I have wanted to go abroad. I have kept saying from the beginning of our relationship that I don't want to live in Korea. But, he has kept saying that we should go out together later, which is not good for me. That makes me really angry. (crying)

Seul was thinking of either going to Australia via a working holiday visa or going to South America via a cultural exchange programme. She did not expect that it could provide her with a better life but she eagerly wanted to escape Korea:

Seul: I want to run away from this tiny home (South Korea). Korea is so small that everybody comes to know what I do. So, I have to be very careful.

One month later, Seul broke up with her boyfriend because he wanted to do so.⁵⁴ After their break up, I had the third interview with her in April 2008. Contrary to my worries, she looked very well. She said that she was in the middle of new relationship with one of her ex-boyfriends, and was infected by a venereal disease by him. She told me bad

⁵⁴ From my friend's brother, I heard that he met a woman who was studying in the UK. Soon after he broke up with Seul, he got married with the woman and moved to the UK with her.

things as giggling like she did when we first met. Seul was looking for a teaching job in an alternative school in vain.

Seul: Most of alternative schools in a city are operated by a Christian foundation, so they require being Christian. Otherwise, I should go to rural area.

3.4 After stories

Yurim went to Australia in June 2009 and began taking a language course. Studying cooking at a university, she met a Brazilian guy and got married. She returned to Korea and worked as a cook, living with him in Korea. Joowha went to Australia in March 2009 and began to work as a foot massager. To extend her working holiday visa, Joowha soon started working in a farm, picking up berries. After spending 2 years in Australia working in service, she got a job in Singapore as a hotel call receptionist and was still working there in 2014. Seul began to work as a teacher in an alternative education school and went to Mexico. Studying Spanish at a language centre, Seul spent one and half years in Mexico and came back to Korea in 2012. She got a job at a social company for 'fair travelling' in 2013. At the company, Seul is guiding students for fair travelling, teaching Spanish in the social company.

4 IN SEARCHING FOR A BETTER LIFE: FEMININITY, BEAUTY, AGE AND GOING ABROAD

To conclude, I will reflect on some points of connection between their precarious lives and affective labour, their perception of femininity and beauty, and their will to go abroad for a better life.

The nature of precarity the women experienced shifted as they got older. During their school years, Yurim and Seul experienced mistreatment from their teachers and other students. Avoiding the hierarchical, conservative, and sexist culture they encountered, they got out of the normal educational route that society offers, forming an artistic subjectivity. This move also was against the norm of femininity (Yurim rejected to be a girl by acting like a boy; Seul challenged the norm of sexually passive femininity by practicing her sexual liberation). However, they found their move to freedom became something that calcified into even fewer prospects when they were a few years older. Aged 25, what they are offered as a route to gain membership into the labour force is only the jobs that are precarious and sexist, which forms their sense of beauty. In their accounts, beauty (in particular, being overweight) appeared as an ‘embodied affect’, ‘an inclination through which beauty is place in the past or deferred to the future’ (Coleman and Ferreday, 2010: 317). In her account, Yurim’s work experience in Australia where she felt like a good worker is recalled as when she was much slimmer and thus prettier. In contrast, her present life is materialised in her overweight body (‘I gained more than 10 kg working in the call centre’). The more precarious her situation becomes, the more weight she gains. Seul’s sense of beauty is more complex because to her beauty is deeply associated with her political project as well. For her, beauty is something that brings her power to exercise her freedom against the existing oppressive Korean culture. Thus, her sense of failure of a political project such as an alternative education represented as ‘being ugly and rustic’. Thus, despite the fact it has endangered herself (through such experiences as date rape and venereal disease) and ruined her intimate relationships, she still shows a strong attachment to her beauty because she felt as if she became useless when she gained weight.

Joowha's accounts show a rather different trajectory from those of Yurim and Seul. While the economic security provided by their parents gave Yurim and Seul more space for experiments, Joowha has much less space. For example, Yurim and Seul were much freer to leave their jobs when they found them too precarious to continue, but for Joowha, it was difficult due to the lack of support from her family. For Joowha, her family relation with her mother and brother was what she wanted to escape during her high school years. She attempted to do so by achieving her economic independence and that was her motivation to move to a vocational track. To enhance her chance to get a job in South Korea, she purposely chose to be trained as a beautician. Despite her economic difficulty, she graduated a vocational college doing various *albas* and achieved several qualifications in practical skills as a beautician. However, the qualifications that she achieved did not seem to help her get a good job. She found her job in the beauty industry quite precarious with extremely long working hours and low income, and requiring emotional commitment to the guests. Thus, she left the beauty industry and moved to another kind of service job, which demand less physical work and face to face service.

The other thing that struck me is the disappearing social relations in their lives. In particular, the accounts of Yurim and Joowha challenge Hardt and Negri's assertion on the potential of forming social relations based on 'affective labour'. Their accounts show the disappearance of social relations in the process of affective labour. Yurim found herself 'left alone with a computer' with no time for social bonding with her friend and family. In addition, her affective labour in the call centre seemed to diminish her affective ability itself.

The women's stories in the chapter show their cruel optimism, deeply jointed with their 'aspirational normalcy' as the three women's stories in the previous chapter.

They were trying to have choices, but found they had so few. Even where they had choices and took them, to ‘not achieve’ these seemed to transform into something else after a while so that what was a move towards freedom becomes something that calcifies into even fewer prospects when they are a few years older. The incredibly brief space for experimentation forms another cruel optimistic relation with digital media as ‘virtual’. The space for experimentation is perhaps shorter than before because of the universal exposure through the Internet of what was a private or intimate life.

In their deadlocked situation with an undetermined and unanticipated future, going abroad was imagined as a chance that they could construct ‘a better life’. The meaning of a better life differs to the three women. For Yurim, it meant a life where she could get a fairer evaluation and recognition on her performance at work so that she could build her career and have a prospect of her future. For Joowha, it meant a life where she could escape from her troubled family relations and social judgment on her social background. For Dasil, it meant a life where she could experiment a different way of life, particularly escaping conservative Korean culture related to sexuality. It should be noted that all of the women clearly recognised that their lives might not be better therein, but they desperately sought an imagined place of possibility and prospect. In this way, they were moving around from one precarity to another.

CHAPTER 7 ‘RICE PEER’⁵⁵: YOUNG WOMEN IN PERMANENT TRAINING

1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter investigates the precarious lives of a small group of highly educated young women who were stuck in search of stable jobs and enduring continual re-training after their university graduation, and how digital media was weaved into their lives.

Five women aged 26-32 from different social backgrounds are the focus of this chapter. I encountered these women in various ways. Three of them (Inse, Woo, Jumi) were accessed through my personal network; one of them (Hyunmi) in a public library; the other (Jehee) via her blog. The methods that I used for the research are participant observation, individual interviews, informal conversations, and online interviews (See 3 in CH 4 and below).

All five women (Hyunmi, Insu, Jehee, Woo, and Minje) graduated a high ranked university, which some of the women in CH 5 and CH 6 desired. Three of them were in their mid-20 and two of them were in their late 20s and early 30s. My aim was to get a sense of the link between the nature of the particular precarity of these women, their ways of life as *baekjo* and their use of digital media. Through the five women’s stories focusing on their work trajectories and intimate relationships, this chapter explores how they came to form a life in permanent training in negotiation with their underemployment and how particular ways of social relationships emerged in the negotiation and how their use of digital media mediates that.

⁵⁵ The term, ‘rice peer’ refers to a ‘meal mate’. This is a newly emerged particular form of sociality among Korean examinees. In their specific situation, they tend to avoid a close relationship that demands some commitment to. Instead, they prefer to a lighter sociality with a proper distance. Rice peers meet only for lunch while studying alone. A form of being ‘alone together’ (Turtle, 2011).

2 HIGHLY EDUCATED WOMEN IN THE LABOUR MARKET

One of the most typical figures of young people out of work is that of those who are training themselves, especially preparing for examinations to get a stable job. In May 2007, according to Korea National Statistical Office, 20% of the five million university graduates were out of work and 9.9% of those who were out of work were preparing for an examination to get a job. Out of young people in preparation of an examination, more than half (57.9%) of them were aiming to enter into the public service sector; 36.9% for general civil servants; 9.2% for teachers; 11.8% for the higher civil service examination such as the judicial examination. In contrast, only 16.5% of them are preparing for a general private company, 7.2% are for media organizations and 18.4% are for public companies (*Segye* 2007 July 30). The great preference of young people for the civil service sector is a recent phenomenon since the IMF era. For example, until the early of 1990s, civil service employment tended to be considered as a tedious and low paid work among university students. As the number of decent jobs in the private sector has rapidly shrunk since the IMF era, the position of civil servant has become one of the most desirable jobs among young people because it guarantees a permanent employment with stable income.

The situation of highly educated women seemed worse than that of men, showing a much lower employment rate through the 2000s (e.g. The employment rate for female university graduates was 62.4% in 2001 and 65.6% in 2006. The figure for male university graduates was respectively 85.1% and 83.3%). Keum (2011) argues that the highly educated women are being excluded in the labour market because most jobs for women are created in the low-end of the labour market. For example, the top 10 companies showed a sharp increase in the number of female employees by 47.6% between 2003 and 2007 (the figure for men was 18.2% for the same period), but most

jobs for women were concentrated in the low-end positions, thus the average income of women was only 61.3% of that of men in 2007 (SBS 2007, April 10).

Faced with the difficulties in private sectors, many highly educated women have attempted to get a job in the public sectors. In particular, with the abolition of the limitation on the proportion of women among public servants in 1989 and 1991, the number of female applicants in the public sectors significantly increased (H. J. Park, 2000: 117). With the degeneration of the female labour market since the IMF and expansion of higher education among women (as described in CH 2), more and more women apply for jobs in the public or professional sectors, which they believe have less gender discrimination and a very small proportion of women have made some visible achievement (so called ‘alpha girls’) (Mo, 2008). The women in this chapter were also aiming to enter into the public or professional sectors. The next section explores how they came to desire such a job in relation to the precarity they have experienced.

3 FIVE WOMEN’S STORIES

3.1 Hyunmi (26): public servant examinee

I encountered Hyunmi (not her real name) in a public library in Seoul, where I used to work during my fieldwork. A public library is one of the most typical places for young people to go study, read books and use the Internet, as well as take advantage of the free study area. As a part of information policy, Korean governments attempted to utilize public libraries as a place for educating citizens, building many new public libraries with digital data rooms (See 3.2 in CH 2). A typical public library consists of four different areas: cultural event area, digital data room, literature rooms, and study rooms. Various people use the public library for various purposes: parents bring their children to

enjoy cultural events for free; young people prepare for examinations; elders read newspapers.

The library where I met Hyunmi is located in central Seoul and looks typical: on the ground floor is a restaurant offering inexpensive meals; on the first is a theatre playing a movie twice a week; on the second are periodicals and the Internet area; on the third and forth are areas for reading books and studying. Study areas are divided into three sections: for women, for men, and for both. Most study areas were full of young people who seemed to be preparing an examination and many of them stayed until the library closed at nine in the evening. I first encountered Hyunmi in the library restaurant. She was behind me in a queue for lunch. She had a typical examinee's look, wearing a sloppy training suit and no make up with a ponytail. After lunch, I found her sitting near my desk in the women's study area. When I left the room around 5 pm, she was sleeping on her face. I left a note on her desk, suggesting having lunch together the next day. One hour later, I received her text with positive answer. We had a lunch and tea together the next day on 12 June 2008.

Hyunmi was preparing for a public servant examination. She was living in a northern part of Seoul with her parents, quite far from the library. She had to change buses twice to get there. There was no public library near her place and she felt reluctant to use her university library because she did not want to see anyone who knew her. She usually arrived in the library at 8 or 9 am and left at 9 or 10 pm.

She majored in fashion design in her university. Right after graduating, she began work as a designer in a children's clothing company. It was a stable regular position but she quit for several reasons.

[I: A designer is a job that many people want to be, isn't it?]

Hyunmi: It's completely *nogada* (Korean slang for construction work).

[I: It must have been a hard decision to give up on what you'd done so far.]

Hyunmi: It's a pity but I can't help it. Because I hardly found my own time... because I thought I wouldn't be happy if I kept living like that...

[I: How long did you work there?]

Hyunmi: About a year and a half. I worked five days a week... almost until 1 am. I went to work at dawn and came home at night. I could not go around outside during daytime. I found it so hard. Also, in our field, the design, are many women. But I felt working with women did not fit me.

[I: Why?]

Hyunmi: Umm.. women are tiring. Women's neurosis...It would be better if there were some men but all were women.. Don't you know the style of *doenjangnyo* (soybean paste girls)? So.. they were very tiring... I am gruff but they were not.. I went to work while crying ... I had to get up at 6am and left home at 7am.. I got up with tears in my eyes. ... I had begun taking on a dark complexion. Six months after I got the job, I met a friend who was a *baeksu*. She asked me why my face became so dark. I never went outside (during daytime) but my face skin became dark because of hard work.

She finally left her job and began to prepare for the public servant examination. When I interviewed her, Hyunmi had been preparing for the examination for one year.

Hyunmi: I thought I would pass sooner or later, but I found the competition extremely high. But, what if I passed the exam.... One of my friends too quit her job and passed the exam. According to her, public servants leave work at 6 o'clock. She loves leaving her office at a fixed time and being paid for overtime work.

For the examination, she was studying five subjects: Korean history, English, Korean literature, Public administration, and Public administration law.

Hyunmi: What bothers me so much is studying completely different subjects from my major such as Public Administration and Administrative Law. The terms used in the subjects looked like another different language. I couldn't even start studying those subjects for the first three months shocked with the strange contents.

Due to the extreme competition, she lowered her goal from grade 7 to grade 9 public servant, which is the lowest position, one that used be considered as a job for high school not university graduates. Although she was spending a lot of time in the library

from eight or nine in the morning to nine or ten at night, Hyunmi thought she should come earlier to the library because other examinees would start studying at seven in the morning. The routine that she described seemed quite hard, similar to that of her previous work.

Having coffee together, we happened to talk about the then on-going candlelight rally against US beef import (See 3.3. in Ch. 4 and discussed in detail in the following chapter) and I found her real life rather different from her resolution. She attended the rally twice. In the end of May, she participated in the street demonstration during the day and stayed at the rally on 1 June until 11 pm:

Hyunmi: I went there with one friend. Others don't care. I came back home early not to be caught by the police... It would be not good to be caught by the police as a *baeksu* playing at home. Around 11 pm, I saw dozens of riot buses coming down... I was afraid.. I run away following other university students and then went home. Coming back home I watched it through Colour TV.

It was her first time to participate in a rally in her life. Since then, she had been watching the rally on *Colour TV*, an Internet podcasting channel.

Hyunmi: I went out because I was too furious about the US beef. But now I hated everything about Myung-Bak Lee (the president). I saw the rally on 10 June on Colour TV until 4am.

[I: How could you study the next day if you watched it until 4 am?]

Hyunmi: Well.. thus, I am dozing and feel tired these days.. Because I stayed up late watching. (hahaha)

[I: Do you watch everyday?]

Hyunmi: Yes. I watch it everyday so I am very tired. I am going to watch it when there is a big demonstration.

At that time, she had her exam just a week ahead. Despite the difficulties she mentioned, she said, she was partly enjoying her life because at least she was free to decide what to do and when to do and where to go.

After we had lunch together, she and I agreed to become ‘rice-peers’. However, we never made it. She often did not come to the library or left early and I also did not go to the library often because I began to spend most time on the street participating in the 2008 candlelight rally.

3.2 Insu (26): a financial company applicant

Attending the 2008 vigil, I continued to attempt to recruit more examinees. In so doing, I met Insu (not her real name) by the introduction of Rena, who is one of my postgraduate school juniors. Insu was Rena’s best friend. Rena was very worried that Insu might feel embarrassed meeting me while she was unemployed. However, Insu was willing to accept my request. I met Insu and Rena together in a seminar café in Shinchon, interviewed them for three hours and carried out an informal interview while having dinner together.

Insu and Rena are university friends. Both of them entered the Portuguese department at a university near Seoul. Most students came from different areas of Korea and Insu and Rena also moved to the local city from their hometown. Sharing a house, six friends used to hang around together as a group. After graduation, four of them except Insu and Rena got full-time jobs. Rena advanced to postgraduate school because she thought she ‘was not ready to go out into society’; Insu continued to prepare for the public servant examination.

Like Hyunmi, Insu had also prepared for a civil service examination for four years since her second year of university in 2004.

Insu: My parents wanted me to become a public servant and I too longed for a ‘normal’ life. A public servant is considered as the most suitable job for a normal life. Although it doesn’t make much money, it guarantees permanent employment and there is less pressure in civic sector than in

private sector like a financial one. I thought it was a cushy job. However, passing the exam is far more difficult than I expected.

She began to prepare for the public servant examination during her second year. In the beginning, Insu aimed towards a higher position (7 grade) but found it difficult to prepare for the examination while studying in university. Soon later, she changed her goal to a lower position (9 grade) like Hyunmi did. In her final year, after two years' trial in vain, Insu even took time off of school to concentrate on the exam but failed. She graduated university one year ago, unemployed.

Insu argued that advantages given to marginalised people in public services discriminated against her.

Insu: One or two points determine who is in or out. There are merit points for disabled persons or children of people who died for the nation. Ten points used to be given to them, but 5 points are given now so that it is very difficult to compete with them. I think it is really ridiculous.

3.2.1 *Female job in financial sector*

When I interviewed her in 2008, Insu had just changed her aim toward the financial sector based on her *alba* experience in the bank. When she took a break from school, she began work at a national bank as a contract worker in Seoul. In fact, for the last several years, her priority was making money rather than studying for the examination. ('My main work switched from studying to making money.') Working almost everyday, she could earn 'a lot of money' (in Rena's words). Her job in the bank was to do telephone surveys of businesses on their business outlook, investment budget, etc. It was paid according to the number of cases they completed, with no guaranteed minimum payment. Thus, no matter how long they worked, if they could not complete a survey, they got nothing.

Insu: The survey is difficult to complete. The people in charge at a bank are likely to refuse to answer the survey because they are busy doing their own work. My strategy is to utilize a feminine attitude and a sweet voice.

The above quotation shows the work is conducted by making a gender relationship through a telephone conversation, depending on men's preference for young women.

Previously, about ten surveys had been conducted a year and each survey was conducted with more than one hundred enterprises. She was competent enough in the job to earn good money. She attributed this success to her 'kind' and 'cheerful' characteristic. However, recently, Insu was not able to make good money from the work. As the bank was about to be privatized, the number of surveys significantly decreased. In addition, since the irregular labour law in 2006, the bank replaced the position with seconded workers in order to avoid hiring them as regular workers.

The reason that she considered the financial service suitable to her was not just because of her personal characteristics and communication skill (she said she was 'good at communicating with others') but also because she loved to save or invest money. Since high school, she always found a sense of security in money.

Insu: I always think of money. My parents managed to make their life on their own, but they don't have enough to support us. Therefore, I have always thought I had to prepare for my future on my own. I feel secure only when I have extra money for a special occasion. Since high school, I have had at least 100 man won (500 pounds) in my account. ... I know that I am not good enough. However, I feel confident that I can do well in financial services ... I've tried to make my money grow fast since high school by using savings and MMF.⁵⁶ Now, I am doing some funds as well. I don't invest money into a risky fund. I invest my money only into safe funds such as national bonds. Seeing my savings grow always makes me happy.

⁵⁶ MMF (Money Market Fund) is a type of mutual fund characterized as a low-risk, low-return investment.

Insu had saved a significant portion of her income. According to Rena, Insu had used not to even order food in a restaurant to save money when she had met her friends and had have only a couple of different changes of clothes to wear.

In a few years, Insu had dramatically changed in her attitude to clothes, realising how critical appearance is for women to get a job.

Insu: I recently spent some money on food and buying pretty clothes, but I used to not be interested in those things at all. [...] For women, appearance is crucial, especially in the financial services. It is a portrait shot that employers look at first because women are initially allocated to positions at the counter. For women who make contact with a lot of people, appearance is the most important thing. One day, a financial company came to campus to promote student applicants to the company. They too emphasised how important a portrait shot is and said clearly that they evaluated pictures of applicants.

Age is also crucial for women. I was surprised to know that even Insu at age 26 experienced obstacles to employment due to her age.

Insu: Age limitation stops me from applying for many companies. They want people who were born after 1985.

[I: Isn't against law to discriminate people based on their age?]

Insu: Yes. But to be honest, isn't it up to companies? They have the right to select the people they want.

[I: How old are those who were born in 1985?]

Insu: They have just graduated this year, so two years younger than us... then 24 years old?

In addition, the timing of graduation is a thing to negotiate. Insu took a break from her school in her final year for one and half years and then graduated in September 2007, which was a year before the interview. She regreted that she had already graduated her university.

Insu: I should have intermitted one more semester. Most students delay their graduation as much as they can because it is more difficult to get a job once they graduate. Most companies prefer students to graduates in the year when they recruit people for internships. Thus, university students try to extend their status as students by taking a double major

programme etc. [...] Recently, some universities let students delay their graduation if they pay a small tuition fee. Hahaha.

Delaying graduation is also a way to maintain a socially recognised status in their everyday lives. Insu felt embarrassed of herself after her graduation when she met friends and family, precisely because of her unemployment.

According to Insu, to get a job in the financial service sector, three basic licenses are required: ‘financial futures counsellor’, ‘securities investment counsellor’, and ‘financial assets manager’. On the day I met her, Insu had just registered at a private institution for these examinations. Insu was resuming her study of these subjects, which are far different from those that she had studied preparing for the civil servant examination. She was soon about to attend some expensive lectures at a private institution.

3.2.2 *Daily life*

Sharing a single room flat with her friend in Shincheon area. Her ordinary daily routine was like this: woke up around 7 am when her roommate, who is a regular worker, was about to leave for work and went to a public library near her house and came back home around 6pm, and after having dinner at home, went to sleep around midnight.

Insu’s daily life seemed to depend heavily on the Internet, starting with the Internet. The very first thing to do was check job openings from several job-related online sites.

Insu: At first, I visit an Internet café in Daum and spend one or two hours checking job openings and then visit another recruiting site. If I find a interesting one, I visit the company’s website, checking the deadline and downloading the application form. Then, I make a note of things to write in my personal statement. Three or four hours pass by in doing so. Then, I go to Hecas (English Learning site) and listen to free lectures. There are daily questions for the listening and reading tests. It takes half an hour everyday.

After writing a resume and personal statement, she received some feedback from the online café not only about the personal statement but also her portrait picture before she hands in her application to the company.

Insu: People upload their picture in the café and ask others' opinion on it. If others tell them to take a picture again, they reply they would do it again. Also, people upload their personal statements saying, 'Please, give me a cruel evaluation.'

Explaining the importance of the picture on a resume, Insu took an example of one of her friends, who is one of six girls who she used to live with in university. Insu and Rena believed that she could get a good job owing to her beauty.

Insu: On uploading her picture on a job site, she was bombarded with a lot of calls and eventually got a job in one of the big companies... For a secretary, I think, good appearance is far more important than ability.

Private collective viewing

In her leisure time, Insu enjoys watching movies, American TV series, or comics through the Internet. She loves to watch *Mid*. In 2007, many Koreans fascinatingly consumed American TV series, a trend spotlighted as a significant cultural phenomenon, the so-called 'Mid heat'. 'Mid' is an abbreviation of 'Mikuk ('America' in Korean) Drama'. Not only the three major Korean television networks but also cable channels filled their weekend night slots with American TV series such as *Prison Break*, *CSI*, and *Grey's Anatomy*. A popular cable channel (OCN: Orion Cinema Network) devoted its entire 24-hour programming to televising selected episodes of *CSI*, which is 'CSI day'. However, the most common way of consuming *Mid* is by downloading them from the Internet. It took her just a few minutes to download one episode of TV dramas for free or a few cents. In addition, she could access an extensive

range of media content, not only Korean media products but also those of other countries.

Insu did not have a TV at home and thus always used her computer to watch TV programs. She watches one or two episodes with her roommate in the evening before they went to bed. Her favourites are criminal dramas such as *CSI*, *24 Hours*, *Bones*, *Numbers*, *Criminal minds*, and *Prison Break*. The only Korean TV programmes Insu enjoyed were entertainment show programmes. According to Insu, she and her roommate downloaded and watched them together while having dinner. Besides entertainment shows, she watched discussion programmes on current social issues, *100 minutes' discussion* (MBC), as part of her preparation for the job interview about current issues. She preferred watching the program using a site called *Afreeca* on the Internet. *Afreeca* is a Korean personal webcasting site (<http://www.afreeca.com>), where users webcast their own channels in real time by sharing what they are watching on their own computer screen. Users even make their own casting schedules with what they have in their computers such as movies, show programmes, and dramas. Another distinctive feature of this channel is that people watch TV, chatting together.

Insu: One day, I suddenly felt lonely watching a TV programme via my mobile phone alone. It is a bit weird to laugh alone while watching something funny. In *Afreeca*, people all laugh together and I can see other people's response. I can see others responding to something in the same way as I do.

Insu had broadcasted more than ten times in *Afreeca*, finding herself enjoying the role of webcaster.

Insu: I loved to be called as 'master' by people. Hahaha.. People asked me what to show.. I played a decisive role.

[I: What kinds of programmes did you stream?]

Insu: I showed mainly animations that have some fandom and recent movies, which many people haven't had yet.

[I: Can't other people download by themselves?]

Insu: Some people don't want to spend money to download and some don't have enough capacity to save it in their own computer. However, most people use *Afreeca* when they don't know what to see. In my case, when I want to watch something but don't know what to do, I come to *Afreeca* and look through what channels are there and pick one of them.

Insu had lately come to enjoy Japanese dramas as well as America dramas.

Insu: Some close *oppa* (literally means brother, but widely used to refer to a older male friend) love Japanese dramas and one of them highly recommended watching *Nodame Cantabile* as a must-see. I did not usually watch Japanese dramas at all, but one day I felt bored so I downloaded one episode of *Nodame* and watched every episode during the weekend. hahaha (big laugh).

Rena: But, we read the comics before the drama.

Insu: Yes. Both of us love comics. Most Japanese dramas are based on famous comics.

Reading comics is one of the things that Insu and Rena enjoyed most during their leisure time. According to them, they had read more than a thousand comics since their childhood. The most classic comics Insu and Nare recommended were what I have already read in my childhood. However, there is a big gap in the way of consuming comics. While I had mostly read comics in paper books through my elder sister's recommendation at a rental store, Insu and Rena's consumption of comics were heavily depending on the Internet.

[I: How do you know which comics are good?]

Rena: I asked *Naver* (the most dominant internet portal site in Korea). There are lots of recommendations for comics. Using *Naver*, I made a list of comics to search later.

Insu: Or, when I've already found a good comic, I search the writer's work or, if I search the comics, there is a recommendation of comics similar to the ones I like.

They were sharing one ID for a file-sharing site so that Insu could read what Rena liked and they talked about what they shared when they met face to face.

Insu: To be honest, I always say to Rena that I would like to live like now forever. I am making enough money to live by working in a bank twice a week. Only if my parents don't mind, I wish I could live a life

forever without a regular job, with making money just enough for my living, meeting friends, and enjoying free days when others are working.

3.3 Jehee (26), a subtitle maker

Jehee (not her real name, 26) is the person who made the subtitles for the Japanese drama, *Nodame Cantabile*, which led Insu to enjoy Japanese dramas. It was one of the most popular Japanese TV dramas among Koreans in 2007. Before I interviewed Insu, I also saw it after the recommendation of my friend. I downloaded all episodes and watched all of 14 hours of them in one day, becoming a big fan in the process. Finding the blog address of the subtitle maker of the drama, I visited the blog and asked her for an interview via her email address that appeared on the blog. After exchanging several emails, we met at a café in central Seoul. The interview was conducted for three hours.

3.3.1 *Working for fun*

Jehee had been making subtitles of Japanese dramas for one and half years. She learned Japanese on her own by watching Japanese TV dramas for the first time. After she finished her third year in her university, one of the most privileged women's universities in Korea, where she majored in Korean history, she went to Japan to study Japanese and stayed there for six months. After she came back to Korea, she started subtitling not to forget Japanese.

[I: How did you start making subtitles of Japanese drama?]

Jehee: There are a lot of Internet communities. People apply to make a subtitle in the communities. In case of popular dramas, there are a lot of people who want to do it so you need to apply first. Each community runs their own subtitle maker team and there are people who do it personally. Thus, a lot of subtitles come out. Out of them, the fastest one usually spreads out through file sharing sites.

[I: Is there any qualification to apply for subtitle makers?]

Jehee: Not at all.

[I: How long does it take to make a subtitle?]

Jehee: In the beginning, it took 13 or 14 hours. It took time to translate drama and to make synchronization by using a programme. I was poor at dealing with the programme. Now, I can deal with the programme so easily and translate drama just by listening it without watching it. It took only 4 hours for the last drama.

[I: What makes you do such long work with no pay?]

Jehee: hahaha.. well... people left comments saying thank you or they enjoyed it. Without that kind of reward, it is really difficult to keep doing it. And now that I want to make it my job, I think it is good practice for my future career.

In the beginning, she started making subtitles because she loved Japanese celebrities and comics. She had made subtitles of the dramas whose main character is played by her favourite stars or whose scripts are based on her favourite comics. It was her final year of university when she worked on *Nodame Catabile*.

Jehee: I was working on *Nodame* even the day before my final exam. My life had a very ridiculous pattern at that time. *Nodame* was broadcasted in Japan at 9pm on Monday and I had a class at 1pm on Tuesday. So I stayed all night making a subtitle, went to school, attend the class, came back home and fell asleep.

Since there are a lot of subtitles coming up, she had to complete the title as soon as possible in order to make her subtitle be used by others.

Jehee: Usually the fastest subtitle spreads widely from one site to the other. So it is easy to be useless if I am late.

With the great success of subtitle work of *Nodame Catabile*, she became famous in the field and decided to become a subtitle maker of Japanese drama.

Jehee: Initially, I had planned to enter a postgraduate school so I didn't prepare any examination for a job like others. I spent most of my time playing with my university peers. However, I found out that there is little possibility to get a job with a MA degree in Korean history. So I decided to live doing what I like to do.

She managed to gain her BA in 2007 in six years. After her graduation, she went to a broadcasting academy to learn how to make video subtitles. When I met her, she had

been working at home for one year. As I contacted her through her blog address written in the subtitle, a cable network company recently contacted her and gave her some translation work. She wanted to increase that kind of opportunity, but did not want to get into the professional field too early.

Jehee: In the academy of broadcasting, a teacher advised me not to enter a professional field when I am not ready because it may ruin my reputation. [...] So I am now training myself.

She thought she was training herself doing her favourite hobby and building her reputation that would be helpful for her career. She was planning to send her CV to cable networks when she felt ready.

Jehee: For my CV, I am trying to advertise myself using my blog in order to work as a freelancer in future.

Her blog address is shown in the beginning and end of her subtitles. People visit her blog, leaving some comments such as ‘thank you’ or downloading her subtitles of other dramas. In this way, she had become popular among Japanese drama fans.

Jehee: Without people’s comments, it would be much more difficult to continue this work. What keeps me doing this are those comments like ‘thank you’.

[I: Have you ever thought of applying to a company?]

Jehee: To be honest, as I am too a normal human, I thought of it a bit. But, one of my friends got a job right after she graduated but quit the job and is now preparing for a public servant examination. She entered *Samsung*, but she ran away from the company, saying she couldn’t endure anymore. I think it would be better to find my own way rather than to hurry up to get a job when I am young. I am comforting myself in this way. Hahahaha...

[I: What makes you the most satisfied?]

Jehee: It is really difficult for people to live doing what they love to do. But, I am now living in that way.

[I: Do you feel anxiety about your future?]

Jehee: Of course, I am! I don’t have the sense of belonging, which makes me anxious. And, I don’t have a stable income, which prevents me from playing and working with easy mind.

3.3.2 *Daily life*

Jehee lives with her parents in *Sungnam*, a satellite city of Seoul. Her parents have a four-story house and each story has an independent house. They let the first and second floor to other households, use the third floor for themselves and let their children use the fourth floor. She has one elder brother who majored in Japanese in Japan and was studying in Australia. Because her brother was living abroad, she was occupying the whole fourth floor by herself. She has a group of six friends from her university. Three of them were working; two of them were preparing for an examination (one for a teacher and the other for a public servant). She met them once every two months.

In her daily routine, the line between work and leisure seemed very blurred. Coming and going between upstairs and downstairs, she was making a routine with a boundary between work and leisure:

Jehee: I wake up upstairs and try to study Japanese about for two hours in the morning and then come down to have lunch. Then, I spend afternoon upstairs 'on the computer.' When I am upstairs, I spend most time in something related to Japanese subtitles. I come down stairs around at six in the evening when my mother comes back from her work. I spend some time with her, eating dinner and watching TV together until 10 pm.

Since her living was heavily dependent on her parents (they provide her with a house, food, clothes and pocket money), maintaining a good relationship with her parents is very important to her.

Jehee: That's the only time I watch Korean dramas because of mother. To make a peaceful life, I should have some time with my mother in that way. Otherwise, she would scold me. 'What the hell are you doing upstairs!' Hahaha (big laugh)

Having shared some time with her mother, she came up to her place at 9 or 10 pm, which is the time when Japanese dramas usually runs (There is no time difference between Japan and Korea).

Jehee: There is a site where I can watch J. dramas in real time, which is *Afreeca*. I usually watch through *Afreeca* because I don't want to spend money downloading it. People in Japan show dramas in real time through *Afreeca*. While watching the drama that I am working on, I make a first draft of the subtitle.

[I: How do you know the drama schedules?]

JK: Japanese broadcasting companies are bookmarked in my computer. I check the drama schedules on their sites.

Hearing her explanation, I was surprised with the speed of circulation of Japanese drama. People in Korea are able to see Japanese dramas in real time and they can see the subtitled one in three hours. 'In some cases, people can get a subtitle for a 9 pm drama at 12.30 am.' When I met her, it took only three or four hours for Jehee to make a subtitle: she was making the first draft watching the drama in real time, reviewing it with recorded video, and uploading the subtitle to her blog.

[I: How did you get the video file of the drama?]

Jehee: People in Japan upload them by using the share programme and people in Korea download them in Japanese drama gallery of DC Inside, Club Box, or Japanese drama communities.

[I: Is there any reward for uploading dramas?]

Jehee: No. They are doing it as a pure hobby.

Even though her work seems quite closely related with video uploaders and other subtitlers, she has never met them at all. When she worked in a team of subtitle makers, she communicated with others only through online messenger.

Jehee: I always keep my messenger (*Note On*) on. It is weird. Although I talk to them everyday, I wouldn't recognise them if we passed on the street. [...] This work is that kind of work that I have to completely do by myself. In addition, I don't even see any subtitles of others.

After the interview with her, I tried to access some uploaders of dramas, but I was only able to conduct an online interview with one man. Because it was illegal to upload videos, they did not leave any contact details and they were very reluctant to expose themselves.⁵⁷

Unlike other informants, she did not want to have dinner or a drink after the interview because she was on a diet. Walking down the street, she told me about the way of her diet, which shows her way of living:

Jehee: I don't like to diet spending a lot of money. I don't like even to go to gym. I just walked for one hour around of my town. I don't like to do things following others' plans. I love to do things in the way that I want to do even though it takes longer time to get results.

After the interview, I became her messenger buddy and found her on whenever I logged on. She seemed to be on the messenger all the time in front of her computer at home, kept in her house.

3.4 Woo (29), a professional graduate school examinee

I met Woo (not her real name, 29) by the introduction of one of my informants, Jungsu (not her real name, 32) who was a doctoral candidate in a local university. Woo is a younger sister of one of the old friends of Jungsu's. Jungsu and Woo have had a long relationship since their childhood. I met Woo with Jungsu at a Japanese bar in the *Kangnam* area in Seoul, where Woo was working at the moment. Owing to Jungsu's support, the three-hour interview went really well. Woo was willing to tell her story,

⁵⁷ Even though I failed to interview one of them, I was able to gather some information that I get a sense of the ways in which they work. There are sorts of small financial rewards. In a file sharing site, uploaders are given a portion of money that downloaders have paid. According to the level of up loaders, they are given points or cash. Even though it is not a great amount of money, they can use the points or cash for downloading other contents from the site or they can pay for their mobile phone bill.

concerns, and feelings to me, and Jungsu gave me additional explanations and her opinion on what Woo said.

Woo (29) grew up in a rural area. Her father is a retired politician and her mother is a housewife. She is the second of four children. She has an elder sister (who is Jungsu's friend) and one younger sister and one younger brother. She came to Seoul when she prepared for the exam to enter university and started living with her younger sister and brother when they also came to Seoul for their universities. She majored in ceramic ware pottery at one of the most privileged women's universities in Seoul. She credited her mother for her own success in entering the university. Woo did not do well enough in her high school to enter a good university in Seoul:

Woo: I was really poor at English. I gave up English since middle school and slept during English classes. Since I had no interest in it, I slept during the class even though I didn't feel dozy. I started getting a private tutorial for English to enter university. I didn't like to get an individual tutorial because I didn't want to get too much attention of others, so I got a group tutorial. At that time, I found the reason why so many people receive a private tutorial. Tutors picked up what questions were coming in exams and taught me how to answer them. However, it was too late and I failed to enter a national university.

Instead, she entered the law department of a private local university near her hometown.

Woo: I loved mathematics. I used to solve mathematics question when I didn't want to study. However, my mom advised me to apply for law school when I failed to enter the national university so I did. In fact, I had a good time there. There were only five girls in the department, so (male) seniors wrote a report for me and gave a ride from my home to school. I heard later a lot of men admired me at that time. Hahahaha (...) I didn't have any particular interest at the moment so I didn't feel a need to transfer to another university. However, my mom told me to quit school to enter a better university.

Following her mother's project for her university, Woo started learning fine arts since then.

Woo: It was a private fine arts institution that decided my destiny. Initially, mom thought it would be difficult to compete with others who

had practiced fine arts since their middle school. However, she heard from a private arts institution that I could enter Seoul National University, Hongdae University, or Ewha University because my score in university entrance examination was higher than other students aiming to fine arts schools. They told my mom that all I had to do was to learn how to draw. My mom thought it could be a good plan for my future, so I started learning how to draw and paint.

The institution asked her to prepare all different kinds paintings required according to universities. Practicing several kinds of paintings, she was not able to find enough time to prepare the written examination and as a result got a lower score and failed in her university entrance examination. The next year, she moved to Seoul in order to learn painting skills. She prepared the written examination by herself and practiced drawing in the evening for 4 or 5 hours in one of the fine art institutions near Hongdae university in Seoul. In the end, she succeeded in entering one of the most privileged universities and her mother succeeded in sending her younger sister to the same university with the same strategy.

During the interview, Woo said several times that people often said that she was nice and kind but she hated that kind of evaluation on her. Experiencing cultural shock in her university, she began to realise that being a good person had no value any more in Seoul.

Woo: I don't think good-hearted is good. It doesn't give me a positive feeling when people tell me "you are so nice".

[I: Why?]

Woo: People take advantage of goodness. Also, I don't think I really am good enough anymore. I used to be 'good hearted.' I treated people from the bottom of my heart. When I said something good to others, I did mean it and I always talked to people in a nice way. However, having suffered while living in Seoul, my way of speaking has changed a lot towards a tough way.

[I: What made you think so?]

Woo: The university is full of rich people. They are so selfish beyond my imagination. I deeply realised that people don't care about others as I do. That is the way of life of people in Seoul. One day, in a class, I baked a ceramic ware for my friend who was absent because I knew she would

fail if she didn't submit a pot on that day. When I submitted a pot instead of her, the assistant told me, "You are so kind." But it didn't sound good to me. It sounded like saying "Why did you do such a stupid thing?" My friend also didn't appreciate my help at all. They do think only about themselves. No one cared about me as I did about them. I suffered a lot from the dry human relationship. For another example, I used to go shopping together with a girl. One day, she told me, "I like to go shopping with you because it feels like I were with my mom. You always say nice comments on my choice like my mom." I felt bad by her comment and began to say critical and negative comments on her choice. [...] Surrounded by rich people, I felt relatively poor.

3.4.1 *Work trajectory*

According to Jungsu, Woo was so excellent in making pottery that she had an exhibition of her own work. However, Woo gave up her career in the field since she found out that she was not able to make a living with her ceramic work. She used to dream of making a living running a small art studio. However, she found out ceramics are too expensive to sell for a reasonable price.

Woo: I was shocked when I visited ceramic ware factories. For me, ceramics are art but not for them. Ceramics are just things for money (for them). To produce as many ceramics as possible, they painted only ten times when they need to paint twenty times. Owing to the tough competition, artists were working temporarily here and there and the price of ceramic ware was going down and down. Observing the situation, I lost my faith in making my living with ceramics. I can't compete with the cheap ceramic wares from factories.

Therefore, she really considered again what she could do well. She did not want to enter a design company because she thought people in the area were so selfish.

Woo: For me, human relationships were the most important factor in considering jobs. I thought the only thing I did well was to help others. Everybody told me that they felt comfortable with me and consulted me with their concerns. So I would like to work as a social worker.

So, she started to work for a civic organisation, which is run by her university professor.

She worked there about one year and ended up with great disappointment for the field.

According to Woo, the professor manipulated the organisation just to get more project funding from the government.

She really considered again what she could do well. Because she wanted to support others and use her major, she thought ‘an arts therapist’ would be great. However, her problem was that such skills were little recognised in Korea. At the time, her mother suggested another way: ‘go to pharmacy school.’

Woo: It sounded so tempting! I hate to move from one company to another. I would like to do something for a long time, not moving here and there. I’ve liked something stable from the beginning. I like ceramics, but ceramics don’t provide me with a stable life. I don’t want to run my own business because I’ll have to continue to worry about my business without any break. I thought, once I entered a pharmacy university, I would not need to do something else again.

With the full of financial support by her mother, she began preparing an examination for transferring into the third year of pharmacy school.

Woo: The problem was there were too many excellent people. I had to study subjects such as biology and chemistry from the beginning because these subjects were not my major area. More than one hundred people were competing just for two positions, so I had to get the highest score on all the subjects.

As many young people who graduate college or university attempt to transfer to more privileged university or job secured departments, the competition for the transfer examination becomes extremely high, so much so that it’s called ‘the second war of a university entrance examination’. She failed to pass the examination after spending one year and doubted her choice:

Woo: While preparing the exam, I felt myself economically useless. It cost a lot to register at a private institution for the exam. 15-17 man won (about 170 USD) per subject. I had to register at least five subjects including English, then 70-80 man won (about 800 USD) and plus transportation fees and books. In total, I needed at least 100 man won (about 1000 USD) per month only for the lessons of the private institution. Nonetheless, I thought I had to live within the track of an institution so as to study properly, not to be lazy. Whenever I registered,

my mother was just able to manage it and I was in agony. ‘Should I have to do this despite all these difficulties?’ ‘Shouldn’t I have to earn money?’ ‘For what am I doing this in spite of no guarantee in my future?’ I often asked myself. In addition, pharmacy stores also seem like a supermarkets. Whenever I’m walking down the street, I lament at the huge number of pharmacies, “Oh! what the hell! How many pharmacy stores are there!” (laughter)

Therefore, she really considered again what she wanted to do. At the moment, her brother in law introduced the job of language therapist to her. One of his colleagues quit his company and entered postgraduate school to become a language therapist. According to him, compared to arts therapists, there is enough demand for language therapists in hospitals. To make enough income, a certificate of the first class of social workers is required; the examination for the certificate requires a MA degree. Thus, Woo decided to go to postgraduate school for language therapists.

Woo: I’d like to support others to succeed rather than pursue my own success. (...) I thought a language therapist would be great because I could not only make money but also feel satisfied with helping others. However, once I started to study for postgraduate schools, I was a bit scared. I had a similar feeling that I felt preparing pharmacy school... very unsecured and anxious about doing nothing but studying. I hated the feeling of nothing. That’s the main reason that I began to look for a job.

When I first met Woo, she was working at a company that provides a help service for people to use the Academic Credit Bank System (See 3.2.1 in CH 2, and Joowha in CH 6 gained her BA through this system), while preparing for a postgraduate school examination. According to Woo, the company helps people to operate the Academic Credit Bank system:

Woo: Using this system, people in college gain extra academic credits to get a university degree by using Cyber-classes via the Internet. This company provides a sort of counselling. On the behalf of them, we submit applications for lectures, let people know if there are assignments, and advise them what subject they have to take.

She worked there from 9 am to 7 pm during weekdays and from 10 am to 3 pm on Saturday biweekly and was paid 90,000 won.

Woo: I looked for this kind of job because it suits me. What I wanted to do is to work only during the morning with 50,000 won in order to have enough time to study. I just wanted to remove the feeling of anxiety for doing nothing. If I were paid a lot, I should feel a lot of responsibility as much as I am paid. Then, I cannot study with the feeling of responsibility of my work. That's why I chose this job. The only thing I have to do is to manage people's schedules.

[I: Where did you find it?]

Woo: Job Korea on the Internet. There are a lot of job openings but they are hard to get because I am too old. I am really good at communicating with people and organising papers, but those aren't seen in my CV. In addition to age limitation, I am too over-qualified in terms of academic background. I thought to remove my university in my CV, but then how I can explain the absence of five years? I am too highly educated for those jobs. There was a good job opening in a hospital that has shorter working hours with a good salary. I thought, 'Could I make a difference even if I study more? I'd like to live with the job if they accept me.' But I failed because I am too old. This company is the only one that contacted me. Problem is that I have to work too long. [...] Since I came here, I can study only one hour a day.

She was worried because she didn't have enough time to study while working in the company. One week ago before the first interview, she had an interview for a project manager in a university department. Her friend who worked there introduced her to the position.

Woo: I had never used *Nate On* (Korean messenger), but since I began to work here, I have to keep it on in order to exchange documents. Thus, I was able to be contacted by her through *Nate On*.

One week later, she moved to the university. She began to work there as an administrator for academic projects from 10 am to 5.30 pm for four days per week with paid 100 man won.

Woo: If possible, I'd love to live forever in this way. I don't understand why I should make a lot of money. When I hear others talking about buying a house or investing funds, I feel like I were living a very isolated life from the society. But, I don't feel I have to live like them. (Hahaha). Sometimes, I sense I am living my life without any counter plan for my future though... (hahaha).. Now I can't say anymore what I am going to do in the future because I have changed so many times so far. (hahaha)

3.4.2 *Intimate relationships*

Although Woo has three close friends (one is working as a private tutor, another is working at a company, and the other is a housewife), she found it very difficult to meet them.

Woo: These days it is really hard to meet friends because they are all too busy. When I feel lonely on a gloomy day, I want to meet someone who I don't need to explain my feelings that much, but all friends are too busy... no... not just too busy... they are not able to come out... Then, I thought, 'if I were married I could have someone.' [...]

While the absence of her friendships made her dream of having a partner, she was worried what she might be faced with if she got married, given her unstable economic situation:

Woo: I think I have too high a standard of men. (...) I would like to meet someone that I don't need to worry about something like 'How would he think of me?' Also, I want to meet someone economically stable. I hate to meet someone who is economically unstable. He doesn't need to be rich but must have a stable job at least. If I were alone, I could manage my life anyhow even if I earned 50 man won monthly. But if the two of us were together, we would blame each other. I don't want to make that kind of situation happen. (...) I don't have any good ideas about marriage. If I could get married, it would be great to have someone on my side forever, which is a picture of my fantasy of marriage. (...) However, the responsibility accompanied with marriage seems a big problem to me. Considering my own characteristics, I'd feel tons of responsibility for caring for others and would have to care a lot about my husband's family. I don't think I'd feel for my husband's family like my own family, so I wouldn't enjoy taking care of them, feeling it as a duty that I have to do.

Her close relationship with her mother seemed to continue. It is her mother who she calls most frequently. Calling her mother was her 'old habit' since her childhood. After her mother succeeded in sending her children to university in Seoul, she also moved to Seoul. When I interviewed Woo, she was living with her family, spending most of her spare time at home studying or supporting her mother. Although she was the second out of four children, Woo seemed to play the role of the eldest daughter instead of her elder sister. For example, she was distributing financial resources to all the family members

instead of her mother. Woo showed a feeling of responsibility and the burden of it. She thought her elder sister lived well with her husband because they were selfish enough to make their lives for their own sake. However, she did not seem to have a will to run away from her responsible role in her family because she thought that other families needed her.

Woo: I too wanted to continue my ceramic work, study or go abroad for English without worrying about money. I don't blame my parents. I just give up on them because I don't have ability to make good money. I don't want to be greedy but I want not to worry about maintaining the minimum level of living. I don't need to go abroad for a holiday but I want to go for a drive when I want. However, if I have to worry about living, I couldn't go on a drive worrying about the expensive gas price.

In closing the interview with her, I asked if she would like to live by herself later although she did not get married. She answered, 'I don't think so. My family needs me.'

3.5 Minje (32), a secondary teacher applicant

I met Minje (not her real name, 32) by the introduction of Min (not her real name, 34), who is one of my university juniors. I have not met Min since my graduation from university in 1998. Min was working for one of the biggest portal sites. Participating in the 2008 candlelight protest, I contacted her to get some advice about the then Internet culture. The interview was conducted in the same way as with other informants. After the interview, Min and I had a private conversation about our life. Hearing about my research, she recommended her younger sister as a unique and good example of *baekjo*, but was worried that her sister would not want to interview because she was an introvert. Betraying Min's concern, Minje was willing to meet me and have a chat about her life as a *baekjo*. Unlike Min's description of Minje ('she is too shy and reluctant to meet a stranger'), she never stopped talking about her life story during the whole interview.

The interview with her was conducted for four hours while having a dinner and drink in central Seoul.

3.5.1 *'56 coffees': life and work trajectory*

One day, she called me to her office and showed me a note, with 56 written on it. I asked what that was. "That is the number of coffees that I've made today," she answered. "It is really hard to feel our presence here," we often mumbled to ourselves. (Minje, 32)

In the very beginning of the interview, Minje characterized herself as a person 'with a very unique CV', who had experienced all kinds of school systems: a vocational high school, two-year college, four-year university, and post-graduate school. When I first met her, she was preparing for the secondary teacher examination while working once a week as a temporary tutor in a Seoul middle school.

As she said, her educational trajectory was distinct from an ordinary one in that she crossed over two different tracks of education. It began with her choice of a vocational high school against the grand flow of chasing for university entrance.

Minje: Unlike my sister (Min), I wasn't good at studying. My sister and I were in the same middle school and teachers often compared me to my sister. I always thought we were very different. Entering a general high school didn't seem fun to me because I thought I would not be able to enter university anyhow. So, I thought it would be better to enter a good vocational school rather than to enter a normal high school. I didn't want to be a shadow of someone else.

Contrary her explanation, Minje did not seem to have been poor at studying. She entered the most privileged women's vocational high school in Seoul, which requires a higher level of scores than that for an ordinary high school. According to my own previous interviews of a group of several students from the school in 2005, they were very proud of their own school while other vocational school students tend to feel

ashamed about themselves. They clearly distinguished themselves from other vocational school students. However, Minje felt uncomfortable with the feeling of pride shared in the school:

Minje: I hate the pride shared amongst teachers and students of the school. Teachers seem to brainwash students, repeatedly calling it ‘the great school.’ I feel sick of something like that. It is just a school... And it has very strict rules so as to maintain its fame. Teachers inspected even which underwear students put on. I should wear only white ones. Anything outside of what the school set was not allowed: students should use a particular kind of hair pin, indoor slippers, bag, etc; bags with English letters printed are not allowed; socks must be folded twice; hair should be in two braids. I commuted from Incheon to Seoul at that time. When I arrived in Incheon in that look, I felt as if I came from another planet.

Although she chose to advance to the vocational school to avoid the competitive culture of the general high school, she also found the culture of the vocational school very competitive.

Minje: (In her middle school) I hated to be surrounded by students who study hard hiding their notes from other students. That is one of reasons that I went to vocational school. (...) However, the vocational school was basically same as the ordinary school even worse because their score determines their job and their future salaries.

According to Minje, for students of the school, getting a job in a big company is not that difficult. The big companies even visit the school to recruit good students. Top students would like to enter financial sector whose salary is the highest; attractive middle-range students tended to enter big companies like Samsung. After graduating, she got a job as an office assistant in a clothing company but quit the job in a year.

Minje: It wasn’t fun to work there so I left the job. I hardly felt my presence in the company. (...) Designers are designing clothes and MDs are modifying the design, but my work is (pause and silence). I felt like nobody in the team. Working there wasn’t that bad but wasn’t fun either. (...) One of my friends also was working as a secretary in the company. One day, she called me to her office and showed me a note, which 56 was written on. I asked what that was. “That is the number of coffees that I’ve made today,” she answered. “It is really hard to feel our

presence here,” we often mumbled to ourselves. Later, she too went to university and studied abroad. I think people like her are beautiful, aren’t they? They are making their life independently any way they can.

The experience in the company made Minje want to be a university student. ‘I admired university at that time. It didn’t matter which university I entered.’ The next year, Minje advanced to a professional college, majoring in Library and Information Science. The first thing she did in the college was to join a poetry club. She recalled the period as the best time of her life when she enjoyed ‘such things of university students’:

Minje: I experienced my heart fluttering with love, fought and reconciled with friends, and prepared exhibitions and festivals together. (...) I used to hate group life, but I found there was a positive side of it. Working together for a common purpose, I realized that sharing a common goal produced a very positive effect. Besides that point, I still do hate group life though.... hahaha.

She said, ‘the most valuable asset’ that she learned from the college period is how to interact with people in the club. Graduating college, she got a job as an associate librarian in a university library. As a college graduate, she was eligible to apply only for an associate librarian as a temporary worker. For two years, she experienced a lot of inequality between regular workers and temporary workers. She worked for 6 days a week, including three days’ night work. While regular workers took a day off after night work, contract workers like her had to come to work in the morning.

Minje: I thought it was an *alba* rather than a proper job being paid per hour. Being paid by hour hurt my self-esteem. I was a so-called ‘irregular worker’ working at a library. There was a big gap between what I thought of myself and what others thought of me. I think it is a matter of self-esteem. I could work less and get paid less, but it would hurt my self-esteem, if I work as poorly as I was treated.

To become a regular librarian requires a university degree so Minje started to prepare for the university transfer examination.

3.5.2 *Life between two worlds*

Due to the tough competition, Minje failed the exam that year. The next year, she transferred to the third year at a women's university in Seoul, and majored in moral philosophy.

Minje: To be honest, I feel ashamed when people ask why I decided to study moral philosophy. I chose moral philosophy according to my scores just in case I failed to enter library and information department. I didn't choose the major with a certain faith. [...] That is the most shameful thing for me to go to university according to my scores.

The university life was far different from what Minje imagined before, which made her 'very confused about how to live':

Minje: I realized that they (university students) are not smart but just good at examinations. To me, they looked really stupid. So many people seemed to live a 'fake life'. They were submitting their report that they bought from the Internet and talking about men all the time. (...) I too once bought a report from the Internet and got a C. hahaha.. For two years in the university, I had thought that I would not live like them. (...) They are so naïve that they are only interested in decorating themselves and meeting rich men. Girls seemed to think being naïve as being 'feminine'. It was a very difficult time. I was in agony.

In her final year, seeking an alternative life, Minje began to work as a full timer in a centre for female workers, taking care of their children.

Minje: It was really painful to observe what was happening there. They worked in a domestic factory system. If a husband is a tailor, his wife is an assistant. When the workload is heavy, both of them have to work overnight making thousands of clothes. While they are working over night, their children are abandoned in the street.

What made her angry was that people took advantage of children for displaying their mercy. For example, one day, a lawyer donated his old piano to the centre when he bought a new piano. Her boss asked her to thank him but Minje felt angry rather than grateful to him:

Minje: Why didn't he donate a new piano instead the old one that he would throw away if he did not donate. Similarly, Korean Airlines donated cabin peanuts and cup-noodles, taking a picture of smiling children for advertising their 'ethnic business'. I think it is better to treat people without emotion rather than to treat people with pity. Sympathy is a different thing from a pity. Sympathy is for other people, which is beautiful; pity is for themselves, which is vulgar.

After a year of work, she changed her status to part-time worker as she entered a postgraduate school. Between the two different worlds, she suffered.

Minje: In school, people considered me as a strange person who is working in a civic organization. In the civic organization, I was also considered a different person who has only a vague concept of the labour movement. People I met there are activists who often attend rallies. For them, I was just an immature girl, but I was a person, someone like them, in school. So, I was always different from others no matter where I was.

Having graduated from the school in 2007, Minje became a *baekjo* preparing for the civic secondary teacher examination. When I met her first time in July 2008, she had failed the examination once and was preparing for the examination again, working as a part time teacher once a week.

Minje: I have thought what kind of job I can do for a long time and for fun. As a result, entering a company became a remote interest. I feel sorry for men wearing their company's badge on the subway. It's nothing different from high school: they are wearing suits instead of school uniforms; company badges instead of school badges. They might think of it as success, but I hate it. The reason I chose to be a teacher is because the job has vacation and I can have time to think at least during vacation.

Near the end of the interview, she confessed that she was not studying that hard:

Minje: This is a secret to my sister. In fact, I haven't studied that hard so far. For the last one year, I have played reading poems and listening to music and I did enjoy the time for thinking. (...) I want to live watching movie and listening to music until very late and get up late and watch movies and listening to music and reading poetry. (...) For the last year, I did nothing but never found it boring. Living out of work provide a lot of time to think... When I was working, there was no time to think. I never found it boring to play by myself. I felt myself like a rat in a circle and I often thought I was like a machine. There is no room to think because people are too busy making a living. (...) I hate to work, but I have to

work for living. Once I asked my friend if she can live on her husband's money. I don't think I can buy clothes or watch movie with his money.

3.5.3 *Being in 'meong': Beautiful distance and media*

What annoyed Minje most was that although she had moved from one place to another in attempt to get proper respect from others, she found her past career followed her.

Minje: When I advanced from college, one senior woman came to me and asked which high school I graduated. When I told her the vocational school, she told me, "That's why you are wearing make up." People seem to have a prejudice against vocational school graduates. (...) when I advanced to university, the same thing happened. I was called a 'transferee' not Minje.

The experiences seemed to make her more reluctant to open herself to others:

Minje: I hate being judged by others. It feels as if I were naked so that I've become very reluctant to meet people. These days, when I met people, I am only joking like an idiot. I sometimes tell them my deep thoughts, but I am scared of being defined when I do. That is what I'm most scared of.

Thus, Minje prefers being alone to mingle with others in public.

Minje: Wherever I go, it takes me some time to adapt myself to the place. Even when people don't leave me out, I tend to leave everyone else out and play alone. Hahaha.. If I have a friend, I talk with only the friend.

[I: How do you leave people out?]

Minje: I just stay alone. At first, people come to investigate me but they soon give up.... I am really scared of meeting people, especially new people. I can't believe that I am now talking a lot to you. In particular, I found it really difficult that I have to meet someone who doesn't fit with me. I have to make a social smile in the situation, which is really difficult for me. Although I try to avoid that situation, but sometimes I can't help it. Then, I stand still there like an idiot. It hurts my self-esteem. It is so annoying to me.

For the last several years, she talked with one friend from her graduate school.

Minje: I meet her once a week. She is the person that I meet most often. But I don't think we are candid friends, which makes me feel empty. I always make a joke in front of her, never trying to share my deep thoughts like I am doing now.

Minje felt very uncomfortable with the situation where they were in competition.

Minje: Because we are preparing for the same examination, we can't help competing with each other. When I completed my master thesis, she got hurt; when I got a part time job, she got hurt, I heard. I am worried, 'what if one of us passes the exam first?' or 'what if one of us gets a job in private school?' It is so annoying to compete with friends. I hate to compete with others.

Thus, what she enjoyed most is to stay at home alone, having her own time with media.

Minje: When I come back home, I feel like that I have performed like a clown outside. I am really happy when I come back home, I turn on the computer, read poems, write my diary, and listen to music. 'I missed this time so much', I thought. Then, three days later if I feel bored, I go out to make a social life. For me, going out itself is a social life.

Minje seemed to build her own space and time with media.

Minje: When I get stressed, I read poems, and then I feel much relaxed. I stay alone, listening to music.

[I: Do you read poems on the Internet?]

Minje: I read poems in paper books. I hardly read anything on the Internet. I don't see even *Naver*. I just copy the poems that I like onto my blog. In my blog are only poems so people don't visit, which is a good thing (hahaha). The reason I don't like blogging is because it is too open. I mean, to visit a homepage, we should know the address but blogs can be searched by anyone. Can it be closed? I don't know that.. but it's too open. But, at least, it's better than *Cyworld*.

[I: Have you ever used *Cyworld*, too?]

Minje: For a while when I were in the university that I transferred to...

It's so odd. It seems a really ridiculous system. It allows people to access to their friends' friends. Thus, people fight each other after seeing others' friend's hompy. I hate *Cyworld*. It is one of the things that I can say for certain sure that I hate. Such openness is ridiculous, I think.

She was operating her blog without telling anyone about it. She let me know her blog address and I sometimes visited it after the first interview. There were a number of poems written by several of her favorite poets.

Minje: I found I am very happy in '*meong*' (being without any thinking). The moment that I don't have to do anything, I don't have to make a

choice, I don't have to communicate... I found I feel happy in these moments.

Recently, she started to think a lot about marriage.

Minje: I think marriage is like gambling. If I could meet someone who fits with me, it would be lovely so that I don't feel alone anymore and I don't feel myself like an alien from another planet. But, whomever I live with, it would be very difficult to live with someone else in the same place. I think a beautiful distance is needed. If I met someone who feel as if 'I were in an island' like me, I could be able to approach the person.

After I came back to the UK, I have kept in touch with her. She failed the examination again and had to wander through another part-time teaching job. In February 2009, she was able to get a short-term teaching job, which ended in July 2009. When I contacted her the last time in July 2009, she was unemployed again.

Minje: I don't know what to do. I feel anxious and empty because I don't have my own criteria. I am really poor not because I don't have money, but because I don't have my own value. I am living in a prison that I have built by myself. (...) What I most regret is to have lived without a dream that I would die for. I think I've worked hard moving from one school to another, but... I have lived doing something that I can do but something that I desperately want to do.

4 REFLECTION

The women in this chapter can be seen in a desired position by the women in the previous chapters in a sense that they graduated one of the privileged universities in South Korea. However, unlike the women in the previous chapters imagined, the women in the chapter did not find that they were in a good position to get a stable job. Woo even thought her high level of education barred her from getting 'a good job', which enables her to maintain a balanced life. After spending time to get a high qualification that Woo believed would bring her more chance to get a stable job, Woo found herself too old and over qualified in the labour market for women in South Korea. As such, the women in this chapter were endlessly moving towards getting more

qualifications to enter into a small number of routes with less age limitation: small portions of professional jobs for women such as public servants, civic teachers, translators, and pharmacists. However, due to the extreme competition, they found themselves in a limbo of permanent training with the sense of claustrophobia and aimlessness. In addition, to these women, studying without making money often gives them a sense of uselessness and uncertainty. To reduce these feelings, they are doing some part-time work. On the other hand, interestingly, most women in the chapter loved and even desired to continue to live this way of life because they found it gives them a balance between work and life, which they thought would be impossible to achieve if they got a proper job. The women's lives showed an extremely delayed 'rites of passage' (Van Gennep, 2011) (e.g. transition into labour market or transition into marriage), expanding 'liminality' in their everyday life. On their move to a better life, their lives are located in between-ness, between two different existential states or positions. Czarniawaka and Mazza (2003: 267) defined 'liminality' as 'a condition where the usual practice and order are suspended and replaced by new rites and rituals.' Their use of digital media is articulated with the liminality in their life. For example, Insu and Rena practice their rituals of friendship during their adolescent period, reading comics; Jehee negotiates her liminality between her hobby and her job; Minje builds her own space, as a shelter from the burden of making a life in betweenness.

The accounts of young women's lives in CH 5-7 showed little evidence of the kinds of possibility of forming a political subject as Hardt and Negri hoped for. Rather, the women tend to show a strong sense of frustration and aspirational normalcy and shared a form of withdrawal to their private spaces. The next chapter offers a contradictory case, which allows us to think about the possibility of forming solidarity and resistance through the use of digital media.

CHAPTER 8 COMING OUT ONTO THE STREET: YOUNG WOMEN'S TRANSFORMATION INTO PUBLIC SUBJECTS

When I opened my eyes in the morning, it was hard to accept the former life as my everyday life. (Rinu, a high school girl, 19)

If I turn off the computer, the world seems so peaceful. When I come back after the vigil, I feel like I am living in two worlds. (Leehe, 23)

1 INTRODUCTION

In Spring 2008, during the middle of my fieldwork, large scale anti-government protests broke out in South Korea. In the beginning, they were known as the ‘beef protests’. This was in response to the April 2008 decision by the new government of President Myung-Bak Lee (hereafter the ‘MB’, as he was referred to in the protests) agreed to fully reopen the Korean domestic market to US beef, which had been shut down since the confirmation of the first US case of mad cow disease in 2003 (TheObserver, 1 June 2008 ; Yonhap, 21 June 2008). This led to tremendous online resistance, calling for the scrapping or renegotiation of the agreement: numerous government official sites were bombarded with messages denouncing the decision, several websites to impeach President MB Lee were set up and more than 500,000 people signed a petition in an online campaign to impeach the president (Koreatimes, 02 May 2008). In May 2008, based on these various virtual fights, people finally came out onto the street. The protests started in early May 2008 and lasted for more than one hundred days, drawing a remarkable 3.5 million citizens to participate (S. Yun and Chang, 2011: 135). It drew much attention from the popular media and academia not only for its unprecedented scale but also for the unprecedented dominant participation of teenagers (C.-K. Kim and

Lee, 2010; S. Yun and Chang, 2011; S. Yun and Chang, 2010) and women (Suhong Chae and Kim, 2010; Jinsoo Kim and Cho, 2011), who were assumed to be apolitical subjects secluded in private spaces and thus not to be seen in a political rally. Also key were the new forms of resistance utilizing digital media.

This chapter investigates three sets of encounters with women involved in the protests, as they developed in the summer of 2008. The first was with a woman that I met through Hope Hall (see CH 5) in the early days; the second was with a group of women who came to the streets from an exclusive online community of women who enjoy reading and writing homosexual romance novels; the third was with two high school girls. In each case, I encountered these women as a media ethnographer myself engaged as a participant in the protests. Encounters were formalized through a series of interviews, informal discussions, and participant observation, which were contextualized by our joint attendance at various vigils over the period May to July in 2008 (See 3 in CH 4 for more discussion on methodology). Most events that I attended were recorded with a digital camera and most informal conversations with the participants were recorded with their permission. In addition, I had additional in-depth individual interviews with the women in the research in order to gather their personal life/work trajectories.⁵⁸

My intension was to ask why and how these women came out onto the street, to see what they were doing on the street, and how it aligned with their sense of the kinds of possibilities or prospects or forms of living or the activity open to them in the terrain of their everyday lives. To do so, I explored these women's corporeal experiences of the 2008 candlelight vigil on the street, focusing on how they traversed from private into

⁵⁸ All of the recorded conversations and individual interviews were transcribed in Korean and the quotations that I used in the thesis were translated into English by me.

public space, how their digital media use mediated that experience, and how their personal life trajectories were jolted through this process.

2 THE 2008 CANDLELIGHT PROTESTS

2.1 The place of the protest and its origin

The place where the 2008 candlelight vigils mainly took a place, the central Seoul around Gwanghwamun, Cheonggye-Cheon and Seoul City Hall, has several significant symbolic meanings among South Koreans. Many significant buildings are located here: palaces from the pre-modern Choson Dynasty, national government buildings, a national theater, the Japanese embassy, the United States embassy, major press centers, and City Hall. According to J. Kang (2012: 335), the area represents ‘the imagined nation-state and its sovereignty’ and is remembered as a ‘holy place of Korean democratization movements’. For example, the historical 1987 protests against the authoritarian military regimes were held in front of the city hall, which produced democratic transitions in Korean politics such as a direct presidential election system (See 2.3 in CH 2). The US embassy, in particular, was one of the destinations of parades of demonstration in the 1980s because of the US endorsement of the authoritarian military regime and the presence of US troops in South Korea. These fights increased the defence of the embassy and the surrounding area and strictly restricted people’s mass gatherings in this space (J. Kang, 2012).

Meanwhile, for the younger generations, the meaning of the area is much lighter and brighter. The area was the place of massive street celebrations for the World Cup in 2002 and 2006. The 2002 World Cup, cohosted by South Korea and Japan fully opened the place to the ordinary people. With numerous giant screens set up by the city on the street in a plaza in front of City Hall, the city and the media encouraged people to chant for the national team on the street. When the Korean soccer team advanced to the semi-

final, people formed massive street celebrations, occupying many blocks in the immediate area. It was a remarkable event considering the previous prohibition of mass gatherings in that space. In addition, more recently, the area of Cheonggye-cheon, a reclaimed stream that passes through the heart of Seoul, was reborn as a popular sightseeing spot. This project was part of the ‘creative city’ movement in Seoul, begun in 2002 by then newly elected major, Myung-Bak Lee, the legendary CEO of *Hyundai Group*. He set up this project to restore the once buried river and transformed the area into a spot to symbolize a high-tech cultural Seoul.⁵⁹ With the completion of the project in 2005, Cheonggye-cheon has become a new spectacle of Seoul, with highly-designed landscape architecture, including a river walk and bridges, and also a high-tech zone with free wifi public access. It became one of the most popular places where many people visit and practice their ‘digitalised leisure’ with their digital camera (D. Lee, 2007: 143-144).

Meanwhile, in November 2002, the first large scale protest in the form of a candlelight rally took a place in the area. It was to mourn the death of two teenage schoolgirls, Miseon (14) and Hyosoon (14) who were run over and killed by a US military vehicle.⁶⁰ As a ritual of mourning, people held the rally at night, with tens of thousands of people carrying candles in their hands. When two US soldiers involved in the accident were found not guilty by the US military, the candlelight rally transformed into a massive nationwide anti-US protest. At the end of November, thousands of Koreans marched towards the US embassy, urging amending the current SOFA (Korea-US Status of Forces Agreement), which gives the Korean government little jurisdiction

⁵⁹ In the 1950s, the river was covered with cement as part of the rapid urbanization project and the area became a symbol for South Korea’s compressed industrial modernization in the 1970s and 1980s (Nam, 2009: 119).

⁶⁰ The accident initially occurred in a suburb of Seoul on 13 June 2002. At that time, the residents in the area, including hundreds of high school girls, started candlelight rallies urging an investigation of the incident (*Voice of people*, 2012).

to try US soldiers in Korean courts (*Voice of people*, 2012). This became a crucial issue in the 2002 presidential election and eventually resulted in a partial revision of SOFA. Since then, candlelight rallies became a popular way to demonstrate in South Korea (e.g. Anti- Impeachment rallies to support President Roh in 2004, the Anti- FTA campaign in 2004), symbolizing voluntary and peaceful citizen's political action. It also represents the change in the way of political actions towards non-violent and peaceful protest in the 2000s (D.-Y. Lee, 2008: 154). High school students have also used the form of the candlelight rally in their protest against oppressive school culture through protests supporting the human rights of high school students and against rules that limit one's free hair style, for example.

2.2 The 2008 candlelight rally as women's rally

Compared to other candlelight rallies, the 2008 candlelight rally was characterized by the dominant participation of teenagers (mostly girls) and women. From the beginning, progressive popular media such as *Hankyoreh* and *Kyunghyang* produced numerous articles defining the rally as women's rally. They emphasized how many women participated in the rallies, how active and pleasant they were, and how effectively they were using digital media (e.g. *Kyunghyang*, 19 May 2008, 'Pleasant Protest'). Three dominant types of women in the protest emerged in those enthusiastic media representations: teenage girls, fashionable young women, and housewives (e.g. *Hankyoreh*, 13 June 2008, 'From students in school uniform to stroller moms, the candlelight women lit'). In particular, a group of young women from fashion and beauty related online communities drew huge attention from the popular media (Jung, 2008; M.-A. Kim, 2008), for the untraditional new style of demonstration by those women. For example, young women from *Souldresser* (café.daum.net/Souldresser), a fashion

café, performed a flash mob wearing mini-skirts in one of the most popular shopping areas in *Kangnam*, Seoul. The so called ‘high heels troop’ became one of symbolic figures of the rally. Later, three fashion and beauty communities made an association under the slogan of ‘Are you an educated woman?’, identifying themselves as educated women not because they were highly educated but because they were concerned about others and public matters (M.-A. Kim, 2008). Their performance as fashionable and beautiful, but thoughtful women challenged the dominant representation of young women as ‘unthinking’ consumerists. Also popular were a groups of housewives from online communities. Taking the traditional roles of housewives as subject of consumer and mothers, they participated in the rallies arguing for consumers’ rights and expressing mothers’ collective worries about their children. For example, a group of members of 82Cook (www.82cook.com), a cooking site, initiated not-buying campaigns against the major conservative press. They called many companies who were advertising with these media outlets and warned that if they did not stop advertising, they would make anti-campaigns against the companies (Kyunghyang, 03 July 2008). In addition, young mothers who attended the rally with their babies in strollers (so called ‘stroller moms’) became one of the symbolic figures of the rally (Jinsoo Kim and Cho, 2011).

Echoing these media presentations, progressive scholars and feminist groups highly celebrated the transformation of women into a new political subject. Teenage girls tended to be described as ‘2.0 generation’ characterized by openness, participation, and sharing (e.g. D.-Y. Lee, 2008). In addition, those studies tended to attribute women’s active participation to the nature of women’s care work (E. Kim, 2008; Y. O. Kim, 2008), arguing that women have become more sensitive to the issue of life because they have taken a role of caring for family as a subject of reproductive labour

(Sol Lee, 2010: 2). The progressive popular media echoed those perspectives in their articles by citing them.

Those explanations for the women's active participant in the rally echo Hardt and Negri's argument about the possibility of a political subjectivity based on the nature of immaterial labour itself (See CH 3). For teenagers, their ability to deal with digital media was argued as the ground of their forming of solidarity; for young single women and housewives, their affective labour was imagined as the ground of their solidarity. As a result, both popular media and academic scholars tended to portray the various women in the protest as being subsumed into a single traditional female subjectivity doing caring labour. Through my journey in the protest, this chapter aims to reveal the particular experience of the women that I encountered in the 2008 candlelight rally and to understand their active participation in relation to the specific situations they faced in everyday life.

3 YOUNG WOMEN ON THE STREET

3.1 The beginning with Amin (22)

It was one of my informants, Amin (22) from Hope Hall (see CH 4) who first led me to the street. Even after I left Hope Hall, we still kept in touch via an online messenger. She was mobilising people to attend the next rally, using the status message: '8PM 6 MAY, Anti-mad cow vigil.' To me, it was surprising to see her message about the rally because she seemed uninterested in social issues at all. Thus, I asked:

[I: How did you know about the rally?]

Amin: From the Internet, there are tons of postings about it in the Internet Cafes.

[I: Which cafes? *Cyworld*?]

Amin: No, in *DC* or *Beti*.

[I: Beti? Are those postings in the café?]

Amin: Yes, there are stories everywhere. People are talking about it all day long.

Beti (a short name of *Bestiz*) is an online community where Amin was spending much time hunting information about celebrities. According to Amin, the café is operated by an individual and very popular among teenagers, for its rich information about celebrities.

Amin: Most of the information I have about the rally I got from *Beti*. On a large site like *DC*, *albas* erase these postings. *Daum* and *Naver* also erased any comments related to it.

She continued to explain to me how serious the mad cow problem is:

Amin: If mad cows were imported into our country, my family or friends or I could eat that, , which scares me. I had goosebumps all over my skin. In addition, there are many issues such as privatization of medical service, water service, and postal service. If medical service were privatized, I would not be able to see a doctor because it would be too expensive for me to pay.

By this time, Amin had attended the rally on 2 May, which is the official first 2008 candlelight rally. She seemed very moved by it:

Amin: I was impressed with the fact that more than 50,000 people gathered at one place for a single issue. I felt so proud of our people. I felt I was not alone and I could verify with my eyes how many people shared the same idea with me.

Following her suggestion, I first attend the rally on the street with Amin on 6 May 2008.

Two of my university colleagues also joined us. As I read in the newspapers, the streets were filled with high school students crowding the plaza of Cheonggye-cheon, with most holding self-made pickets.

Figure 4 High school students in the 2008 virgil (May 2008, taken by me)



The form of the rally seemed to me a combination of the candlelight rally and the World Cup street event. In the beginning, participants holding candles, were listening to what people on a free speech stage said and shouting ‘MB OUT’ together. Many high school students (mostly girls) were taking to the stage and proclaimed their views. What they said were mainly about two issues: ‘mad cow disease’ and ‘mad education’. They argued that adolescents were most vulnerable to the US beef for two reasons. First, they have to eat school meals without any choice, and these meals often use the cheapest food to reduce the cost, and thus were likely to use the US beef. Second, they would be exposed to the US beef for much longer time because they are young. High school students greatly contributed to making the atmosphere of the rally cheerful and fun with creative self-made pickets and in various costumes (See the above picture)

After the free speech time, several musicians took the stage and gave some performances, which was a typical form of the World Cup events. The rally transformed into an outside concert, where people were dancing along the music.

On 25 May 2008, when the government made an official announcement to import US beef, protestors came out of the plaza and began to march down the street, heading towards *Cheongwadae* (the Blue House, the Korean presidential residence). The issues of the protest also expanded beyond US beef to a more general reaction against the neoliberal policies undertaken by the MB government, such as privatisation of public services. To block the street parades to the Blue House, the riot police began to forcefully suppress the participants, producing physical conflicts between the police and participants. At this point, Amin stopped attending the rally because she sensed it was too dangerous to attend.

Nevertheless, the police's violent suppression, being webcasted live by participants, inspired more people to come out onto the street. During the 2008 vigil, several groups of people webcasted the vigils on the spot with their notebooks and web cameras using the wireless Internet connection of the area so that people watched the rallies in real time via a personal webcasting channel, *Afreeca*⁶¹ (<http://www.afreeca.com>) (See 3.2.2 in CH 7, for the explanation of *Afreeca*). I was one of them. At the end of May, watching the protestors clashing with police, I went out to the street at 1 am because I felt I should do something for the protest. However, when I arrived the central area, I found the situation far different from what I saw in the Internet. At the front of the parade in the area near the Blue House, there was a clash between the protestors and the police.

⁶¹ According to *Hankyoreh* (2008, 3 June), on *Afreeca*, 1891 channels broadcasted the vigil on May 31 2008 and 1.06 million people watched them; 2501 channels opened on June 1, 2008 and 1.27 millions connected to them.

Figure 5 People recording the event (31 May 2008, taken by me)



Figure 6 A group of webcasters in the protest (27 May 2008, taken by me)



However, the rest of the area was peaceful and even cheerful. It looked more like a carnival. People were occupying entire streets of the central Seoul: some groups of artists were performing songs, painting, or installing an artwork; a group of young women were seriously discussing about the rally sitting down on the street; some people were repeating some rituals of the World Cup such as a running down the street with a national flag. Others were riding bikes to deliver food and water to the front lines. This continued well into the night, ending only when police started to break down the participants between 4- 6 am. The experience gave me a sense of freedom and a feeling of pleasure, which made me desire to attend and remain at the rally. From that point on, I began to actively attempt to interview and contact young women participating in these demonstration.

3.2 Leehe (23) and Gong (32): ‘Thoughtful sisters’

The atmosphere of the protest shifted greatly on 10 June 2008. Commemorating the ‘June democracy movement’ (10-16 June 1987, See 2.3. in CH 2), a large-scale demonstration was planned on that day and the government blocked the central street with massive shipping containers. A huge number of people had gathered for the protest, with estimates of protestors on the day reaching one million.

After the rally on 10 June, the police began to suppress the protestors more forcefully and some conservative groups, including Vietnam Veterans Associations, began holding counter-protests, intensifying the tension between progressives and the conservatives (Koreatimes, 15 June 2008). While the progressives emphasized that the protestors were ‘pure’ citizens who came out onto the street forming ‘collective intelligence,’ a term coined by Levy (1997), the conservatives argued that the protests were ‘unpure’ riots led by a pro-North group (J. S. Chae, 2009: 137).

Figure 7 Protestors on the street (10 June 2008, taken by me)



Figure 8 Lines of candlelight on the street (10 June 2008, taken by me)



In this situation, the principle of non-violence became an important issue to debate among participants. Some people argued the need for a more militant way of demonstration to make a change; others argued to keep the rally peaceful in order to keep their ‘purity’. Sang-Gil Lee (2009) argued that this morality of ‘purity’ was deeply embedded in the process of the protests.

Figure 9 A female protestor (the centre) holding a self-made picket saying ‘Peaceful rally’ ‘Non-violence’ in front of the container barricade set by the government (10 June 2008, taken by me)



To counter negative media representations, rallies began to be held in front of major media companies such as KBS, MBC, Chosun-Daily, and YTN. On 13 June, a group of Vietnam veterans threatened the protestors in front of KBS, holding a LPG container on the top of their vehicle. The protestors in central Seoul moved to KBS, so did I. I encountered Leehe (not her real name, 23) and Soohe (not her real name, 19) there.

When I was about to leave around 2 am, they approached me and asked the way to go to MBC. Heading towards MBC, we had an informal conversation. Leehe and Soohe are sisters living with their parents in Incheon, a poorer city neighbouring Seoul. Their father works for a public company and their mother runs a small business. Leehe was working as an office assistant for her uncle's company, after dropping out of her college; Soohe was in her final year of high school. They had been actively attending the vigil for the very beginning. Similar to Amin, they had never attended in a political rally before and were previously immersed in fandom. Wondering how fan sites were being related to the participation in the vigil, I asked Leehe for an interview.

One week later, Leehe texted me that she would come to the place where the police were clashing with the protestors and I also joined the place. Since then she and I began to attend the rallies together. Attending several of these with her, I found that she belonged to one of female online communities that were actively participating in the rally and naturally encountered other members of the community on the street. Because most of them were unfamiliar with the area, I sometimes played the role of guide for this group of women. While the group tended to stay where there were no physical clashes between the police and the protestors, Leehe wanted to go to the front line where police was fighting with the protestors. Thus, Leehe and I often separated from the group during the vigils and re-joined them later in the morning.

Soon, another member of the group, Gong (not her real name, 32) also joined us and the three of us participated in the following vigils as a small group. After we attended several rallies together, I had an individual interview with her in the middle of rally. Gong was living with her mother and elder sister in *Kangnam*, an affluent residential area in Seoul. Her father is a retired higher police officer and her mother is a housewife.

3.2.1 *Boys' love in protest*

Leehe started to attend the vigils in late April by herself, when only a handful of people protesting at Sora Plaza in Cheonggye-cheon. It was an unusual thing for her to come out to Seoul because she was 'too lazy'. Her concern about her family's health pushed her to attend the vigil: 'My father crazily loves beef and my mother is planning to set up a restaurant in the near future.'

Like Leehe, some members of the community began to attend the vigil by themselves and reported it to the community. Soon, people shared their mobile numbers to contact each other on the spot on the 'meeting board' of the community. Gong also began to attend the vigil with other members at this point. After attending several vigils near her home in *Kangnam*, she joined the central vigils. As the police began to forcefully break up the protest, the community began to attend the vigil in more organised ways, operating a 'text supporters' system for 'protecting' the members on the street.

Leehe: When the vigil was peaceful, it was okay whether someone came out to the vigil or not. But, as the vigil became more violent, the members were worried a lot about the safety of the members. [...] Most members are living in local area. What they could do was just nervously watching the Internet (live webcasting).

The main purpose of 'text supporters' was to warn the members where it was particularly dangerous. Members at home collected information about the situation of the vigil, watching several major sites related to the vigil, including *Agora*, *Afreeca*, *Color TV*, and *Ohmynews*, and would text the members on the street using the free texting service of online messenger. Leehe was also continuously communicating with other members by texting about where they were and what happened in the rallies. When Leehe was at home, she also took on the role of text supporter and texted me messages as well.

Most of members on the street seemed to meet each other face to face for the first time here. They were identifying each other by their online ID and using some unique terms, which I did not understand. Surrounded by them, I felt like I was in an online world. Sometimes, mistaking me as one of the members, some people asked me a question: one asked which ‘*dong*’ I was from; another if I had seen ‘the ad’. To them, Leehe promptly explained that I was not a member. When I asked about the community, Leehe ambiguously explained that it was an online community of women ‘aiming to read, write, and discuss books’, but she wanted to hide the exact name and address of the community.

One day, in the middle of another vigil, we got soaked in a clash with police spraying water cannons on protestors. When we were sitting on a side block to dry our clothes and smoke, Leehe suddenly whispered to my ear:

Leehe: [Lowering her voice] In fact, we are BL. (me: BL?) Boys’ love. It’s *Yaoi*. BL refers to *Yaoi*. [...] I am not allowed to say this. If I were found that I had said anything about what happened in our community, I would be expelled.

I wondered why Leehe suddenly lowered her voice and was so cautious not to be heard by others. For confidentiality sake, Leehe did not tell more about the community on the street. Instead, when I met her personally in her hometown, she explained to me why they were hiding their ‘real identity’ on the street and why she was so cautious to tell about her community.

Boys’ love (commonly abbreviated as ‘BL’) refers to a genre of erotic romance between two ‘beautiful men’, created by and for women.⁶² In high school, Leehe first came across BL, reading ‘fanfic’ which describes homosexual love affairs between idol

⁶² The genre emerged as a subgenre of Japanese comic (manga) in 1970s and has been adopted in other media such as anime, novels and movies (Welker, 2006: 841).

members.⁶³ Searching for more fanfic on the Internet, Leehe encountered the BL novel community. At that time, BL communities were easily accessible through popular portal sites, but soon the situation changed. In 2000, the Minister of Information and Communication announced a new law to regulate online contents deemed harmful to adolescents, marking homosexuality in particular as one of harmful categories by law. Teenage girls of fanfic communities actively protested against the law, making fanfic a social issue (e.g. Hangyre 21, 2000, 9. 6. 'We are resisting with a mouse'). The conservative media graphically reported that teenage girls were enjoying and making homosexual erotic contents. Since then, Leehe's community transformed it into a very closed and exclusive community avoiding regulation, taking several measures to survive: first, the server was relocated overseas beyond the regulation of Korean law; second, it expelled all under-aged members (adolescents) from the community; finally, all members were required to prove their identity by submitting a scanned resident card and showing their age and picture on their blog.⁶⁴ Leehe remembered it as 'a scary and hard time' for the community, arguing that it was a 'witch-hunt' because it did not regulate other adultery contents for men.

In this process, the community has constructed a dual natured online space. On one hand, it provides anonymous safe space by blocking access from the outer world. It is officially prohibited for members to release the addresses of BL communities, making it very 'difficult for people to join BL communities.' (For this research, I also tried to access a BL community but could not.) On the other hand, another side of the space does not seem anonymous at all. Although they are using a pseudonym in the

⁶³ According to Yurim Han, fanfic in Korea emerged from the fandom of H.O.T., the first idol group in the mid-1990s, and is positioned as one of essential elements of fandom (Han, 2008: 34). With the domestication of the Internet in the late 1990s, reading and writing online fanfic became a popular practice of fandom among teenagers in South Korea. Leehe was one of them.

⁶⁴ According to Han (2008), many other fanfic communities went through a similar process, hiding themselves and setting up a strict sign-up procedure to protect their communities from the outer world.

space, the personal information is shared among the members and even with other BL communities. 'If expelled from one community, one would not be accepted by other BL communities.' That is why Leehe was so cautious to tell me about the community. It was against the community rules, which may cause her to be expelled. In this sense, their online ID is fictional but real.

3.2.2 *Pleasures and risks of being a BL*

Therefore, it was a very difficult decision for the community to come out onto the street for the vigil with the risk of being exposed to the public. To hide their identity as BL, the four biggest BL communities - each of them has more than 10,000 members- associated and created a pseudonym (meaning 'thoughtful sisters') for the association. Furthermore, they even actively showed their presence on the street to the public by using a flag with the name. Leehe explained this act in relation to the active participation of other women's communities. Both Leehe and Gong seemed to be empowered by the active participation of women, as I did.

Leehe: The more female members there are, the more interested in the vigil. Particularly, the community has many members in their 30s playing an active role in the vigil. Remonterrace, Ssanko, Souldress, and Myclub are all the case. Those who are in the front are not men but women! They look really cool. Especially, 'Souldress' sisters are so gorgeous. They look full of thoughts. They are leading everything. Recently, they gathered money and made a newspaper advertisement to support labour unions. We also wanted to use our flag on the spot like other female communities.

When I interviewed Gong, she also asked me to write about the vigil as a women's rally.

Gong: Women's more active participation in the vigil (than men) indicates that women are far more enlightened than men. Women are modernised while men are still old-fashioned. [...] It was 'Ajumma'

(housewives) who led the not-buying campaigns. People couldn't ignore 'Ajummas any more. Ajummas, who were supposed to stay at home and thus can't do anything, seem to feel proud of themselves by taking on many issues.

She also expressed strong sympathy with her mother as a powerless housewife. Her parents separated three years ago when her father began to live with another woman. According to her, her father had been asking for a divorce but her mother has been refusing to do so mainly because of financial reasons (they were living on her father's pension). Gong seemed to have been a very obedient daughter under her father's strict control. In high school, her father occasionally called her teachers from the police station, investigating if she was making any trouble. Because he did not identify himself as her father, she had to explain it to her teachers. In addition, it seems her mother has been making important decisions in her life so far (telling her life story, Gong often added, 'because my mother told me to do so.'). Following her mother's advice, Gong entered into a local university and majored in French. However, she hated the 'inferior university' and found no interest in her major. She wanted to drop out of the school but did not because her mother told her to gain a university degree anyhow in order to get a job. She managed to get a job as soon as she graduated. After four-years working in a small trading company, she quit her job in order to focus on what she wants to do, which is writing BL. When I met her, she was unemployed for a half year.

Gong had been writing a 'weird, light, fantasy novel' for three years. As an amateur BL novel writer, she often visits several popular commercial communities for women such as Myclub and Miznet. In particular, she enjoys reading personal stories from women on those sites.

Gong: To write a novel, I am trying to hear as many people's stories as possible. Housewives write a lot. In *Myclub*, there are stories that make me not want to marry. I feel very sorry for them. Cooped up at home, they have to do house chores. In *Myclub* and *82cook*, (women write) that they were scolded by their husbands and mothers in law.

Reading and writing online had significantly changed her previous thinking, 'enlightening' herself, particularly in relation to sexuality:

Gong: The Internet broke various illusions that I had before. I didn't know that many women were having sex before marriage. It was shocking to me. ... To be honest, before the age of 30, I thought highly of chastity. However, it's hard to write because of my lack of experience. People asked me to describe (the graphic) scene more realistically. I feel shame on myself for not having any experience. I should have met many men when I was younger. ... I feel shame on my old body. How beautiful are the women's body in graphic movies? I envy you. You can escape here.. There is a concrete wall against women. The reason for my writing a novel is that I can write what I want.

As the above quotation shows, to Gong, the practice of writing BL has a meaning of going beyond the limitations given by Korean society: a pleasure of transgressing the normative gender norm in relation to sexuality. However, in relation to the genre of BL, what is interesting is the absence of women's bodies. They choose men's bodies to express their own desire. Studies on Korean BL communities (Han, 2008; Hoonsoon Kim and Kim, 2004) suggest that women experiment with their sexuality through male characters. The reason for choosing male instead of female bodies is because they feel uncomfortable identifying women who are sexually active or sexually abused. However, enjoying BL gives the women a sense of risk about intimate relationships in their 'real life' and thus something to hide:

Leehe: All of them (older women in Leehe's face to face Incheon meeting) are not interested in marriage at all. ... first, their taste (BL) makes them feel uneasy (about marriage). Also, they feel heavy about marriage because they should take care of not only the man but also his family, which they hate. [...] They even call it 'coming out' (to say that they are BL). They said, "I don't know how to talk about this to my boy friend" ... One was found and fought with her boyfriend, saying "don't you watching pornos? This is my own similar kind of taste." Men watching porno is considered natural, (lowering her voice tone) but if women see graphic sex, (people said) "What's this? It's so vulgar and dirty." There are so many graphic sites (for men). Why should only our sites be regulated? We were severely crushed when raising our voice against the regulation.

3.2.3 *Performing femininities in the rally*

While they play with masculinity in BL, they were playing with femininity in the vigil. Using the pseudonym of ‘thoughtful sisters’, they created a new subject to the public, who are ‘caring, learned elder’ sisters, which is confirming the dominant femininity. This position is in the line with that of women’s communities, they played traditional women’s roles as ‘caring’ consumers. Like other women’s communities, they gathered some money several times online, supplying protestors with food, water, hot-packs, and raincoats. By positioning themselves as older women, not as young women, they create a double-position: with females, it creates a condition of solidarity; with males, it creates a higher position according to age hierarchy. They called major newspapers, riot policemen, male university representative as if they are their younger brother or son (for example, ‘that’s my good boy’).

On the contrary, they also performed fragile femininity, at the same time constructing an ideal masculinity as a protector. The debate surrounding the *yebigun budae* illustrates this case. *Yebigun budae* refers to a troop of reserve soldiers. Korean men have compulsory military duty (currently for 21 months). When they complete their duty, they become a reserve soldier (*Yebigun*) for 8 years, and serve only in case of emergency. In late May, a university female student was kicked by combat policemen and the picture of it widely spread on the Internet. *Yebigun* voluntarily started to make a safety-line between people and combat policemen, arguing that they would protect women and the weak from the police, as part of the protestors. However, the presence and role of *Yebigun* was very vague on the street because their role was very passive. They were not protesting against the police. Instead, I had to wonder, ‘Who protects them?’

Figure 10 A safe line of Yebigun budae (28 June 2008, taken by me)



The presence of the *yebigun budae* evoked contradictory responses from participants. Although some feminists criticised that they were marginalizing women in the vigil by reproducing the conventional gender roles, most female protestors on the street greatly welcomed their presence. The women of the BL community also emphasised how they felt secure when a group of men were protecting them:

I feel safe to have protective men here. They are necessary people for us.
(Hatoru, 30, one of members of the BL community)

Not everybody agreed. Different attitudes toward *yebigun budae* created tension among female protestors on the street. On 5 July, when I was attending another vigil with Gong, a university feminist group handed a flyer to the participants. It argued that the side effect of the male group of protectors was the marginalization of women in the vigil. Gong showed her strong hostility against the feminist group. ‘That’s ridiculous! Then, should women fight against the police in front like men?’ Since I was on the side of the feminists, I did not know how to react to her response, creating an awkward silence between us.

3.2.4 *Negotiating the fear of violence*

On the street, the use of violence against the police was one of the key issues among protestors, which shaped the nature of vigil, the gender relation on the street, and thus influenced women's participation in the vigil itself.

What prevented the members from attending the vigil was fear of violence. According to Leehe, only 30 to 40 out of more than 40,000 of the on-line community were attending the vigil on the street. People who had attended the vigil in the beginning were not coming out anymore because they thought it was too dangerous (like Amin did). 'I told them that it is safe if they don't come to the front, but they wouldn't come out.' Meanwhile, Leehe felt uncomfortable staying within a safe zone.

Leehe: The text supporters have a good point, but.. do you know what is the bad side of it? It makes me not to come to the front because we know where is dangerous. We are always avoiding dangerous places.

Leehe grew separate from her group beginning with a particular day in late May:

Leehe: It was 6 or 7 am after I spent all night on the street. The police pushed and pushed. I was so scared to see three water cannons coming down. So, I decided to come back home. On my way to subway, I saw so many combat policemen coming to the place. I knew how humble our barricades were. I became speechless to feel so sorry for people there. ... I was a runaway. I ran and hid. I was a coward.... Coming back home, I turned on the Internet and saw pictures where people were bleeding, beaten by a combat policeman's shield on the very spot that I had sat. I had been there....Both my sister and I cried with shame. I hated myself. (...) After then, I came out to the front. I don't care about text supporters. I want to come to the front. Recently I feel much more comfortable. I don't want to have that dirty feeling never again.

The quotation reveals how Leehe expended her boundary of community from the BL to the whole group of protestors, experiencing a crisis in the middle of the vigil. She abandoned the text supporters for the support she found 'on the street'. The forceful suppression of the protestors greatly contributed to building a strong sense of community by forming a situation where she wanted to act as a member of the

protestors. To me, this seems to be what led people watching the Internet at home to come out onto the street. Performing on the street, people want to feel that they are an indispensable member of the group, which is a rare experience in their everyday lives, as Leehe and Gong described:

Leehe: I can't stay at home too worried about others in the vigil. I know I am not that useful, but feel *it might be going wrong if I were not here*. Hahaha... *It makes me feel I am needed*. (hahaha) [*my emphasis*]

Gong: I feel like they are my family. Just by seeing people in a vigil, I am happy.

Leehe: I thought that life was so hard and people were hard-hearted, but I found that the people attending the vigil were not that way at all.

Meanwhile, the more violent the vigil became, the more marginalized women were on the street. In the beginning stages of the vigils, women's presence arguing non-violence on the front was welcomed and highly evaluated because of its contribution to making the vigil peaceful.

Since women are in the front, the riot police can't attack easily. Delivering food and water, they (women) are weakening tension between the police and us. (a man in his 30s on the street)

However, in the later stages, the attitude towards women arguing 'non-violence' changed dramatically. On the street, I witnessed several times where women who argued 'non-violence' were scolded by the middle aged male protestors. Leehe also had a fight with a man and Gong was also scolded by a middle-aged man when she chanted 'non-violence' seeing him beating a policeman:

Don't come out if you are going to do so. You are weakening people in the front. What the hell do you know about a protest? (a middle aged man in the street)

Figure 11 Blocked Gwangwhamoon Road (28 June 2008, taken by me)



Figure 12 Blocked City Hall Road (28 June 2008, taken by me)



Figure 13 Protestors with water horses (28 June 2008, taken by me)



Figure 14 Leehe in a riot police helmet (28 June 2008, taken by me)



3.3 Hyuna (18) and Rinu (19): two high school girls

In early July, I happened to attend the vigil with two high school girls, Rinu (not her real name, 19) and Hyuna (not her real name, 18), who had been active participants in the vigil. I first came to know Rinu through the website ‘candlelight girls’. Collecting various images of the vigil and observing interactions on the site, I saw Rinu’s posting. According to the posting, she was living in a local city, planning to come to Seoul for the weekend vigil, and looking for someone to stay with her overnight on the streets. Worried about her safety, I left my mobile number and the next day we met at the Seoul City Hall plaza on 5 July 2008. Rinu came with Hyuna. Hyuna also left her mobile number and waited at the bus terminal for Rinu. Although they also first met each other on that day, they looked like they had already become best friends. It was the last day of Rinu’s final examination. Rinu was a first year high school student living in Cheong-ju; Hyuna was a second year high school student and living in Seoul.

3.3.1 *Adolescents’ rally*

Before attending the rally, we had lunch together, exchanging our views and prospects of the vigil. I came to know that both of them had participated in the rally from the very beginning. In particular, Hyuna, who lives in Seoul, was one of the initial participants. She argued that the vigil was an adolescents’ rally but adults intervened and it then degraded into a violent rally where protestors were dividing and fighting each other. She foresaw that in the end, high school students would soon come back and recover the vigil again. Her self-made picket was expressing the wish: ‘Be careful, we are soon on a summer vacation.’

Figure 15 Two highschool girls on the street with a self-made picket saying 'Be careful, We are soon on a vacation' (5 July 2008, taken by me)



Through her introduction, I was able to conduct an online interview with one of initiators of high school student's candlelight vigil, Taewon (not his real name, 17, male, a first year high school student). He gave me a detailed explanation of how he could mobilise people to come out onto the street. It was in April 2008 when he first started to organize a candlelight rally against the US beef.

Taewon: Witnessing the way the government dealt with the mad cow disease issue, I realized how incompetent it was. It was very humiliating, miserable diplomacy. So I posted several articles on online communities that I belong to (popular Internet forum sites), but in the beginning this didn't work at all. The problem was the Internet. People would not come out to the outer world, trapped in the window of the Internet. Even those who are interested in the issue couldn't dare to think about taking action, stuck just forwarding postings between sites on the Internet. Adults might become fearful due to their previous experience....

[I: How did you make people come out onto the street then?]

Taewon: I made a separate café for teenagers against mad cow disease and spread hundreds of postings in the most popular communities among teenagers, emphasizing "Adults do not take action for us. We ourselves

should take a step forward to protect ourselves. It is not only our matter but also our children's matter." I remember that I tried to persuade them that if we didn't take such steps our children would suffer from it.

According to him, in only two days time, he received a huge response from other teenagers in those communities, and his posting was widely circulated by them. Many students joined the community that he made.

Taewon: Then, I tried to organise some events for students to come out and participate in. I organised a rally against educational policies driven by the government. Later, I made an association with one of the biggest teenagers' community (which is *JJukbbang*⁶⁵) and led activities for the candlelight rally. I think everybody was waiting for someone to take the first step. They needed a leader.

[I: Weren't you afraid of taking a leading role?]

Taewon: I think I was so naive at that time. I thought I should take a step forward without any hesitation. I should have prepared more carefully. I never expected that it would become such a tremendous thing.

Hyuna began to attend the rallies in these early days. She was living in the southern part of Seoul. She normally went to a library or private institution after school and came back home around midnight, which allowed her to attend the vigil without being noticed by her parents. According to her, she had been sent to private classes since her early years in school:

Hyuna: Since the final year of elementary school, I've come back home around 12 am ... At that time, my father lost his job and my mother began to run a small business so that she came home after mid-night while my father stayed at home. He arranged me to take private classes for all subjects after school because he thought I was not studying enough hard at home. But I've loved it because I don't have to come home early if I don't want to. I felt very uncomfortable staying at home with my father because he is very conservative. It's okay only by saying I have additional classes at night. Since then, I've wandered alone a lot here and there.

⁶⁵ JJukbbang is an abbreviation of 'JJukJJuk bbangbbang', which means gorgeous and glamorous. According to Hoon, it was originally a fashion related community where several 'ulzzang' (beauty) celebrities were made. It had 500,000 members with one or two thousand postings each day.

For Hyuna, this was not her first time to attend a political rally. In her final year of middle school, wondering around Gwanghwamoon area, she encountered anti-FTA demonstrations. Searching about the FTA online, she became interested in the issue. For the last two years, she had often attended various rallies, especially related to educational issues such as the campaign for free-hair styles at school. Seeing the notice about the vigil against mad cow beef on the Internet, she came out without hesitation.

Hyuna: I first went to the rally by myself and met other high school students there and joined the cafe, 'teenager association' which hosted the initial candlelight rally in early May. Since then, I participated as a member of the association. Most of the café members met each other on the street. Whenever I see high school students participating in the rally, we asked them to join our association. In that way, more and more students gathered.

On the other hand, Rinu has a different track to the vigil from that of Taewon and Hyuna. Taewon and Hyuna's frontier role is heavily grounded on their locality, living in Seoul. Living in a local city, Rinu joined the vigil later than Taewon and Hyuna. She encountered it in downtown Cheongju, shopping with her friend. She made a speech on the spot and gained great attention by the adults. Since then, she became an active member in a local political group supporting the vigil.

Compared to other teenagers in the rally, Rinu is a special case in that her father actively supported her participation in the vigil. Her father even called her school and asked to let Rinu come back home early so that she could attend the vigil on June 10. As a farmer activist,⁶⁶ her father raised Rinu as a highly political subject. In her early childhood, Rinu was asked to read a lot of books and learn Korean traditional songs (*Pansori*) while rarely being allowed to watch TV or go online. In addition, he sent

⁶⁶ According to Rinu, her father was actively involved in the university students' movement in 1980s. After graduating, he used to work for a company but quit the job and returned to his hometown and became a farmer, devoting himself to the farmer's movement. As a highly educated farmer, her father was actively involved in anti-FTA demonstrations and shared his beliefs with Rinu.

Rinu to a '*daean hakgye*' (alternative school, see footnote 53 in Ch 6) for her middle school, when Rinu's parents got divorced. Her life in the school seemed terrible.

Rinu: I didn't want to go because I had to live in a dorm, separated from my parents. Furthermore, teachers had only 'ideal image' of school without any teaching experience. They seemed to open the school without any proper preparation, only dreaming of their ideal school. Also, what my parents and I overlooked was the fact that students who come to the alternative school are those who have been expelled from their previous school rather than those who pursue another way of learning.

Furthermore, Rinu experienced severe bullying by other students twice. At first, five girls dragged her to a remote place and each of them punched her seven times. The second time, she was beaten by boys with a wood-stick. In the end, she left the school permanently and moved to a normal middle school. However, her parents again sent Rinu to another informal high school but she also left the school in a year, disappointed with the lower qualified students and teachers. After some break period, she re-entered a general high school as a first year student. That is why she was two years older than her peers at school. At that time, her father recommended her to go to university by self-studying but Rinu chose to enter a normal high school.

Rinu: I wasn't sure if I could control myself alone well enough to enter a good university. Also, I wanted to belong somewhere and feel like a member of the group, studying together all day long.

When I met her in the rally, it was in the middle of her first semester in the school. At that time, she was facing difficulty in adjusting herself to the conservative school culture: the senior student representatives asked her to memorize a name list of all former student representatives; a classmate made fun of her mother's remarriage and her family's poverty. Furthermore, a group of student representatives often exercised physical punishment on juniors, forcing them to do push-ups. It sounded like the military.

3.3.2 *Another view on the rally*

Taewon, Hyuna, and Rinu offered me a different view, challenging the dominant representation of the rally. According to Taewon and Hyuna, at first, high school students in protest were not welcome.

Taewon: The gaze of adults was very cold and harsh on ‘children’ taking a step forward.

Hyuna: When we gathered at Cheonggye-cheon for the first time, adults told us “What the hell are you doing?”, “Aren’t you studying?” or “Go home and study.” Then, they suddenly began to say they would help us.

In addition, Hyuna and Rinu voiced negative views on *Agora*. *Agora* is an online forum space provided by *Daum*.⁶⁷ The popular media emphasized its critical role in forming the 2008 vigil and the progressive media scholars tended to celebrate the emergence of a ‘multitude’ constructing ‘collective intelligence’ through *Agora*. People in *Agora* called themselves as ‘agorians’ and ‘keyboard warriors’. Interestingly, both Hyuna and Rinu expressed a strong hostility against it, in that one particular group of people dominated the space, producing a particular point of view. Far different from the positive representation by the progressives, Rinu and Hyuna argued that *agorians* were ‘keyboard worriers’ rather than ‘keyboard warriors’.

Hyuna: Watching the Internet from their desks, they dictated where we should go. It’s good to let us know the way... but they incited people to make violent clashes. [...] Usually clashes happen after midnight when the number of protestors grows smaller. They (*Agorians*) are controlling everything, watching webcasts and using a map. Once they decide where the protestors should head, it spread widely. Then, the police see it as well. Don’t you think the police would definitely see it? They (the police) are not stupid. Thus, the police block the way, but agorians keep inciting people to go that the way.

Rinu: On the night between 30 May and 1 June, a lot of people got hurt. A sister, who is a volunteer, sent me a text saying, “agorians are so annoying.”

[I: Why?]

⁶⁷ At this time, Daum was the second biggest portal service company in Korea, following *Naver*.

Rinu: They (*Agorians*) incite people. They seem to think it is important to gain attention from the press. What is important to us is how long we could make this candlelight rally last. We don't want to make this rally something like a temporary bomb that would blow away in a second. *Agorians* cause people to get beaten and then emphasise that the police have beaten us. They seem to think of the rally in a short term.

Hyuna: If we say, "Why don't you come out instead of sitting in front of computer?", they attack me as if I were an '*alba*'.

A female media activist, Taek (28) also expressed a similar opinion with Hyuna and Rinu, based on her personal experience.

Taek: *Agora* is problematic. I think it is a collective violence. It was ok in the earlier stage, but later they began to exercise violence over people who have different opinions. In that aspect, even though they call themselves individuals, they exercise collective violence. In fact, I am an agorian too. (hahaha) I think that is the characteristic of portal sites. Public opinion itself becomes power there. It could be seen as a process for individuals to find democratic space, but I wonder how valid it is compared to the power of the portal media.

Similarly, on the street, male adults were exercising a controlling power over adolescents, showing contradictory attitudes toward them. For instance, on 5 July, when I was marching down the street with Rinu and Hyuna, a group of male adults who had led the student movements in 1980s were leading the street march in the front. Rinu and Hyuna were following right after the group, shouting, 'Join us, democratic citizens' to people watching the march on the roadside. I was surprised to see them approaching people on the roadside without hesitation. They did not seem to have fear of people, unlike Leehe, Gong, and myself. I was just watching them, worried that people on the roadside might attack them.

However, an unexpected attack against Rinu and Hyuna came not from the outside but from the inside. Initially, the leading male group cheered when Rinu and Hyuna actively followed their chants and asked the pedestrians to join the march. However, their attitude suddenly changed when Rinu and Hyuna expressed their own opinion against them. When the leading male group attempted to go too far from the

central Seoul area, Rinu and Hyuna began to shout, ‘stop, stop, turn around’ and then, some men of the leading group shouted, ‘leave here, you children’, looking at them angrily. It seemed common for Hyuna to experience the hostile response from the middle-aged. For example, when she got a taxi at midnight on the way to home, Hyuna was scolded by the taxi driver for attending the rally and not studying.

Meanwhile, over the vigil, many people asked Rinu and Hyuna to take a picture together holding Hyuna’s self-made picket, like mascot dolls in an amusement park.

3.3.3 *Holding the vigil*

To Hyuna and Rinu, the 2008 vigil seemed to be providing an unusual place where they could perform a leading role as autonomous social subjects, feeling a sense of community, which seemed to be the main engine for them to attend the vigil persistently. Therefore, Hyuna and Rinu wanted to stay in the vigil as long as they could, escaping from their ordinary life.

After the street march with Rinu and Hyuna, we joined another group of graduate students and their teacher. After having dinner and some drinks, I called a taxi for Hyuna to go home. On the way to the taxi, she burst out crying.

Hyuna: I want to stay here longer. It’s really a rare experience to me. In school, I am just a poor student. Am I that guilty for being poor at studying ?

After Hyuna left, Rinu spent all night on the street as she had planned. Rinu continuously exchanged texts with other protestors who she came to know in the previous vigils and actively approached a group of high school students who she did not know before.

While the BL women group tended to be separate from others and behave as an exclusive group, high school students were actively approaching each other and

building solidarity on the street. While Rinu was joining another group of high school students, around 4am I went home to get a short rest, exhausted by the long street march and rally. When I met Rinu again in the early morning, I heard that people had a *ganggangsulae*, a traditional dance where people make a big circle holding hands and weaving around and Rinu danced alone in the centre of the circle.

Rinu: I love coming here. I feel as if I had known them for ten years although we talked for ten minutes. I feel sad to see the space disappearing.

Rinu returned to Cheong-ju in the afternoon, but the next day, she did not go to school and came to Seoul again. On her way to Seoul, she texted me and I met her again with Hyuna.

Rinu: When I opened my eyes in the morning, it was hard to accept the former life as my everyday life.

Thus, she decided to quit school and revealed her decision to her father. Her father tried to persuade her to pause her decision just for one week, complete the semester, and consider again during summer vacation. However, Rinu did not want to do so, causing a fight with her father.

Rinu: I don't understand. So far, he has treated me as an adult too much. I had to fry eggs by myself at the age 5 and have to do everything by myself now including cooking and washing. Then, he suddenly says that I am too young to make my own decision. Isn't it ridiculous?

Rinu wanted to quit school and live with her friend in Seoul. She felt the local city was too small and old-fashioned. I did not know how to advise her. I did not want to ignore her opinion but did not want to encourage her to run away from home. After calling her father to let him know she was with me, I barely managed to persuade Rinu to come back home.

As Rinu sensed, the space created by the 2008 vigil was disappearing: much smaller numbers were attending the rally, exhausted with the long period of protest; public opinion on the vigil became worse and worse as the conservative media marked the vigil as a riot by the unemployed. The government and police began taking legal measures against the protestors.

At the end of July 2008, I came back to the UK to complete my degree, leaving behind the on-going vigils, feeling guilty about running away alone. Even though I left South Korea geographically, I was still connected with some of my informants via the Internet including online messenger, blogs, and emails. Leehe also seemed to return her routine life as an enthusiastic fan of *Arash* (a Japanese Idol), using ‘*Arashi* (a Japanese band) life’ as her messenger ID. In an online messenger chat, Leehe showed off that she succeeded in buying several tickets for the band’s concert in Seoul.

Leehe: The tickets are usually sold out in several minutes on the Internet. Right after my work, I went to a PC bang with a much speedier Internet connection than my home. After waiting for a long time in front of computer, I was able to click faster than others. I could sell some of the tickets for a much higher price.

Unlike Leehe and me, Rinu and Hyuna refused to return to their previous lives, remaining at the vigils. Hyuna was actively involved in the organization for high school students’ human rights and even took a chair role in the vigils. Rinu eventually quit her school and began studying by herself, doing ‘*alba*’ (part-time work) at a bakery and occasionally attending the vigils in Seoul.

4 REFLECTION: THE MULTITUDE AS WOMEN

The progressive popular media and media scholars have dominantly represented the 2008 candlelight rally as an uprising of ordinary (not political) people who formed ‘collective intelligence’ or ‘general intellect’ using the digital ecology of South Korea

(e.g. K. Jeon, 2008; Jin, 2008; J.-K. Lee, 2008). Following Hardt and Negri, they argued the emergence of the ‘multitude’ through the use of digital media, which is immaterial labour. Women were one of the typical groups who formed solidarity using their immaterial labour. By emphasising the immateriality as the common point to form solidarity, the progressives also attempted to prove that the rally was led by ‘pure’ (not political) citizens not ‘impure’ people as the conservatives argued. In addition, while the conservatives called the rally as that of the *baeksu*, the progressives emphasized it as women’s rally.

What I witnessed in the protests was quite different from the dominant representation. When I tried to find ‘pure’ young women in the protests in mid-June, I often found myself surrounded by so many ‘impure’ political people such as large groups of middle-aged women, who were building cleaners on strike against the transition into ‘indirect employment’. Also, there were many middle-aged men in the front line where the protestors clashed with the police. They were the group of cargo truck operators on strike, who were arguably one of the groups in the most precarious condition in the Korean labour market.⁶⁸ Also, the women that I encountered on the street were mostly underemployed (*baekjo*) and thus they were able to attend the rally all day and night, as I did.

Nonetheless, not only the progressive media, but also protestors themselves on the street seemed reluctant to make themselves visible as underemployed or irregular workers. In addition, I have to confess that I also consciously erased protestors on strike

⁶⁸ According to Yoon (2014), cargo truck drivers are working as self-employer under a multi-layered outsourcing chain. Since the IMF crisis, they became ‘self-employed’, so that they should buy their own cargo truck and pay all the transport costs including oil. The rate of commission of agencies reaches 40% of the total freight charge. Furthermore, it is not uncommon for agencies to end a contract without any advanced notice or to ask drivers to pay a premium for renewal. In 2008, when the oil price rose by 20%, the cargo labour union went on a large scale strike in June, in the middle of the 2008 candlelight rally, asking for the setting of a standard price for transportation.

such as middle aged building cleaners and cargo truck drivers in my account of the vigil for fear that my account might become too old fashioned or too political. Anyhow, I felt it was a line not to across. They did not seem to fit with my discussion about a new form of solidarity using digital media. However, in retrospect, what was new is the renewal of the old forms of exploitation.

Attending the protest with my informants, what stuck to me most was the gap between the enthusiasm for women in the media and academic discourse and the hostility towards women on the street. At the level of discourse, women were imagined as a new political subject of post-modernism, grounded in their traditional reproductive labour. This echoes what Andreas Huyssen (1986: 45) called 'imaginary femininity', featuring a 'masculine identification with woman,' such as the male writer in his analysis of Foaubert's *Madame Bovary*. Huyssen analysed that the author's 'fantasy of himself as women' was grounded on the shared 'period's hostility toward real women.' (ibid). Similarly, the accounts of the women in this research reveal a high level of the shared hatred of women in South Korea, which formed the particular ways of women's participation in the protest. The 'imaginary femininity' cast women as caregivers and non-labourer in the protest. Furthermore, it contributed not only to concealing the precarious conditions that the women faced but also to making the presence of numerous precarious workers on the street invisible.

I argue that what enabled the formation of a sense of solidarity among the various protestors was the shared precariousness in the protest and in their everyday lives. In this regard, the rally can be seen as a rally of precariats, who formed a sense of cross-class and cross-gender solidarity on the street.

CHAPTER 9 IN SEARCH OF SOLIDARITY

If I had climbed up and up,
 As many people said, there would have been a very happy world
 I did not expect that
 I'd climb up and up, because I had no place to go
 The light to kill the dark made me to climb up and up
 As you know, I am a totally ordinary person.
 I climbed up only because I wanted to live just a little bit more
 Now my name is disappearing
 I am just too ordinary a person

In 'An ordinary person', a Korean song by Lucid Fall (2009)
 (My translation)

1 INTRODUCTION

This thesis has investigated the nature of the precarious lives of underemployed Korean young women and how their use of digital media was integral to those lives. By investigating their life/work trajectories, I have explored how their personal lives were interwoven with broader social change in the post-IMF South Korea. In addition, this thesis has looked at their use of digital media at work/home as part of their communicative ecology.

It draws on precarity and immaterial labour, key concepts in studies on new forms of labour and life in neoliberal, post-industrial society. The thesis hopes to contribute to this field of research in two main aspects. Firstly, moving away from an ahistorical, Eurocentric, and androcentric tendency, through ethnographic fieldwork, it reveals the particular gendered nature of precarity historically formed in a particular geographical site, South Korea. In particular, it focuses on how new forms of precarity intersect with old forms of precarity given by the particular society in relation to gender. Secondly, it links the two concepts, which are closely related theoretically but located in different fields. The concept of immaterial labour tends to be adapted to explore digital

media uses; the concept of precarity is used to explore forms of life and living conditions in relation to casualised employment. That is, the former is used to focus on immateriality; the latter to focus on materiality. It demonstrates how precarity is a condition leading to individuals taking up forms of immaterial labour in an attempt to manage their precariousness.

To conclude, this chapter offers my reflection on the particular meaning of precarity to those women in study and its relation to the particular ways of lives formed by them. Then, it reflects on the relation between precarity, immaterial labour (including digital media use), and various forms of solidarities in their everyday lives and its social and political implications.

2 PRECARIETY AS BEING NOBODY WITH LACK OF PROSPECT

What I opened up at a granular level in the thesis is the textural qualities of the precarity for particular young women as lived and experienced over a period of time in the specific context of South Korea. This is what Raymond Williams called ‘structures of feeling’: a ‘felt sense of the quality of life at a particular place and time’ (Williams, 2001: 63). As Williams attempted to grasp ‘the emergent culture of a new generation’ with the term (O'Connor, 2006: 76), I have attempted to investigate ‘precarity’ as a ‘structures of feeling’ among contemporary young women living in neoliberal South Korea. I have focused on their practices, including media practices, and asked how they co-constitute this form of life, and I have looked at its social and personal implications and costs, and its contradictions.

The extent and nature of underemployment varies according to their age and educational background and possible options given to them in the Korean labour market. The precarity sensed by the women in the research is not quite the same for each of the groups but there are also commonalities even if some of them belong to a different

social class. The forms it takes are arguably very specific to the particular neo-liberal economic/social/political dynamics of the post-IMF economic restructuring and expansion, as I have shown. The combination of patriarchal and hierarchical relations, a deep cultural conservatism, ideological commitment to hard work and status combined with the roll out of highly developed communications networks and extensive higher education produces a mix that shapes precarity in very particular ways. In their negotiation with the particular precarity they faced, the four groups of women I talked to developed different forms of life: lives encircled to an extreme level of social withdrawal; lives doing various part time jobs; lives stuck in permanent training; lives protesting on the street. Resisting the precarity they faced at home/ school/ work, these women were attempting to find more freedom in their lives, but often found themselves in a very constrained space after a while.

Related to the gendered nature of precarity, given the continuing concept of young women as temporary labour, age has emerged one of the critical elements that they felt limit their choices and closed down their options at work and thus in life. In this situation, as they were getting older, they considered marriage as a way of an exit from the deadlocked situation, but to them, marriage meant adding old forms of precarity in their lives through traditional women's role as free labour of the domestic sector, which requires high level of affective labour such as caring children and the elderly. They also recognised the reality that they were likely to work as well to cover the unstable income of their virtual husband. Thus, a strong hesitation or resistance against marriage emerged among the women, reinforcing their sense of lack of an escape route from their precarious lives. In addition, despite the widespread underemployment in material worlds, the hierarchical boundary between unemployed and employed still persisted and led them to feel themselves as 'nobody'. As such, to

the young women in the study, precarity meant being nobody with lack of prospect, interwoven with a sense of frustration, uselessness, aimlessness and being trapped. This led them to form a very isolated life avoiding people's judgments on them, and simultaneously to form strong desire of being 'normal' in society, what Berlant called 'aspirational normativity' (2007: 275).

3 PRECARIETY, IMMATERIAL LABOUR, AND SOCIAL SOLIDARITY

Their desire to be 'normal' was closely related to the formation of 'cruel optimism' (Berlant, 2006, 2011), with education, jobs, beauty, love, celebrities and even protests. This was also their attempt to build social solidarity in their everyday lives, which their use of digital media was integral to.

The process of my research was also embedded in those attempts. What I aimed ultimately through the research was to investigate the possibility of the formation of solidarity based on the shared precarity, which the autonomists Marxists hope for. As a feminist researcher, building social solidarity with the young women that I talked to was not only my research aim but also a critical tool of investigation. Even if there is a gap in educational and social background between us, I intentionally pursued to build social solidarity based on collective identity as underemployed women, *baekjo*, hoping to build a form of cross-class solidarity as precariats as the autonomist theorists argue. Although there was little evidence of the formation of collective identity as precariats and political solidarity based on it, various forms of social solidarity still persisted and emerged in those women's daily life in their negotiation with precarity.

Saalmann distinguishes a strong idea of solidarity and a weak idea of solidarity. A strong solidarity is based on obligation, dependence, responsibility and morality while a weak solidarity is based on relationship, connection, mutual assistance and

reciprocity. The former refers to ‘an older kind of solidarity consisting in a relationship between *like* persons or with the social tie in a community’ while the latter refers to ‘a new kind of solidarity that between *different* persons who do not belong to the same community’ (Saalmann, 2002: 2). In Parsons’ words, the former is ‘a premodern “solidarity with friends” characterized by affectivity, collective orientation, and particularism while the latter is ‘a modern “solidarity with strangers” where affective neutrality, a balance of self-orientation and collective orientation, and pluralism guide people’s actions’ (cited in Saalmann, 2002: 3). However, in reality, both forms of solidarity seem to coexist with an unclear cut between them. In retrospect, the kind of solidarity that I had pursued to form in the fieldwork was a new kind of solidarity with strangers based on a mutual assistance through an older form of solidarity, friendship, through which my research took a form of intimate ethnography. The relationship that I actually built through the interactions with the young women in the research was mainly in a new form of solidarity in that I was required by them to play a ‘functional role’ as a teacher or mentor (Saalmann 2002: 3). However, at the same time, the more dependent they were, the more longing for a form of strong solidarity. For example, with Amin in Hope Hall (CH 5), I formed a strong solidarity that requires a high level of dependence, responsibility and morality, because she was really in need. In contrast, my relationship with the women in CH 6, 7, 8 was relatively based on a balanced power relation where both of us freely came in and out of our relation, which was based on social distance, independence, and such social capital to enable mutual assistance.

As such, at a general level, the degree of precarity in the women’s lives affected the kinds of solidarity they formed. As Vasta (2010: 510) points out, ‘social solidarity is not a given. It needs to be negotiated and constantly re-created and expanded to incorporate new diversities and changing identities.’ Resisting diverse forms of

precarities they faced in everyday life, the young women in the research had formed various mixed forms of solidarity and their immaterial labour was deeply entwined in the process. The accounts of the women in CH 5, who I termed, *baekjos*, reveal how their precarious lives with lack of strong solidarity with their family and friends have undermined their affective abilities, their capacity to communicate and to engage with the social world. This led them to find themselves unable, or challenged in their capacity, to undertake ‘affective labour’ at work, which is almost the only route given by the society for them to enter the Korean labour market.

In contrast, the three women in CH 6, the *albas*, managed to form a form of strong solidarity with their family or friends. For Yurim and Seul, support from family offered them a choice to come and out of precarity at work, which Joowha did not have. In addition, all of them formed a community with their friends for mutual recognition, support and reciprocal arrangement. Yurim and Joowha depended heavily on the community while working as an immigrant worker in Australia and Seul made her alternative life out of the formal education system through it. In the labour market, those women in CH 6 were ‘efficient’ affective labourers with excellent communication skills and the capacity to ability to form social relations. However, their work experiences as ‘affective labour’ had exhausted them and challenged their ability to build up or maintain intimate relationships that also required affective engagement. Their unpredictable work schedule also made them hard to maintain intimate relationships with friends. This greatly challenges Hardt and Negri’s hopeful expectation of building solidarity through the widespread diffusion of affective labour into the production realm. In those women’s lives, it seriously undermined the grounds of social solidarity they had formed with their friends. While the women in CH 6 were forced to weaken social solidarity, the women in CH 7, the *examinees*, intentionally formed a weak solidarity

(like ‘rice peers’), faced with fierce competition for a stable job where they put themselves into in order to escape from the precarity they had experienced in the previous jobs.

Digital media use, as a form of ‘free labour’, was integral to the process of the formation of social solidarity by those women in the study. For example, the women in Hope Hall (CH 5) attempted to build social solidarity through online communities where they exchanged mutual recognitions and assistance with people who have similar concerns and difficulties in social relations such as homophobia. However, they found it a very weak solidarity that existed only through online connection and had a potential threat to be attacked by strangers. Thus, they sought to build solid relationship through face-to-face interactions by organizing a ‘self-help’ meeting, but it did not work well. Particularly, fandom practices were significantly integral part of building social relationships in my informants’ everyday lives, where their ‘play’ is converted into ‘work’ producing economic values in digital economy. For them, fandom had various meaning depending on what they wanted to escape from through it and had a different relation with their underemployment depending on the amount of cultural capital. In Amin’ life (CH 5), it meant a realization of her ideal relation with her mother and a way of becoming a person who could support people she cared, through which she could find her value in society. While Amin’s fandom activities were limited to a role of consumers due to her lack of economic and cultural resources, Insu and Jehee played a role of producers respectively as a webcaster and a subtitle maker, mediating the fandom of Japanese dramas, using their subcultural capital. At the same time, while for Insu, it meant partly creating a sense of being together through connected viewings, for Jehee, it was part of building up reputation for her future career as a professional subtitle maker. I argue that these efforts to build social solidarity through mutual

recognitions are the critical route for them to become ‘free labour’ workforce for the digital economy. In this regard, Lazzarato (2009) was right to argue that precarity is the condition of neoliberalism rather than its result.

In contrast, the accounts of the women in CH 8, which show free labour workforces’ transformation into political subjects, offers different implications to the possibility of the formation of political solidarity. Vasta argues, in contemporary social movement, ‘at a general level solidarity has become individualized, more global and abstract and more strategic’ (Vasta, 2010: 518). This ‘abstract solidarity’, which is built through ‘much social interaction over the web by groups who do not know each other’, has little obligation and responsibility to maintain long-term relationships where ‘people can move in and out of commitments’ (Vasta, 2010: 517). The 2008 candlelight protests opened exceptional spaces where online abstract solidarity had become materialized as the protestor on the street formed solid solidarity with long-term engagement and sense of obligation and responsibility to others. For example, abstract solidarity based on BL communities had transformed into solid solidarity based on political resistance on the street. It was also the moment for them to form ‘inclusionary solidarity’ with *strangers* on the street, out of ‘exclusionary solidarity’ with *BLs*.

As Vasta warns, social solidarity can produce ‘domination or exclusion with the creation of in-groups and out-group’ thus it can lead to inequality if it does not properly account for ‘differences of class, gender, ethnicity, age, place and other forms of social difference’ (2010: 510). Vasta defines this type of solidarity as exclusionary solidarity ‘based on a narrow definition, on a single criterion of similar values, or a national identity’ (ibid: 510). In contrast, according to Vasta, strong solidarity can achieve only through inclusive solidarity based on ‘the drive for equality and a fair distribution of power; having the willingness to subordinate private concerns to public interests;

expanding public rituals of sharing, including the sharing of resources; recognition of the other, or mutual recognition; engaging with our differences; developing a protocol of duties of outsiders' (Vasta, 2010: 509). These elements seemed to enable the 2008 candlelight protests. Various groups of people were capable of building collective identity as protesters against the government based on mutual recognitions of differences between them. However, this movement soon had to deal with their own forms of discrimination with the continuing hierarchical orders against women and adolescents. The young women who I encountered in the protests were commonly confronted with 'exclusive solidarity' of others. In this regard, it shows that solidarity cannot exist while these power differences exist, as Vasta argues (*ibid*: 510).

Thus, I argue, understanding what kinds of power differences exist among precariats can be the first step towards formation of solidarity based on our shared precarity. Simultaneously, it should be based on mutual recognition of the fact that we are all dependent on each other. As Butler (2004) argues, precariousness is an ontological condition of human being. Accepting our dependence can lead to the deconstruction of neoliberal social relations based on independent entrepreneurial subjects and the construction of cross-class solidarity based on our shared precarity. Our dependency can be the site where we can build strong solidarity, not a feeling of shame.

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APPENDIX: LIST OF INTERVIEWEES

| NAME | AGE/SEX | EDUCATION (RESIDENCY) | NOTES |
|--|---------|--------------------------------|---|
| MAIN INFORMANTS (15 UNDEREMPLOYED YOUNG WOMEN) | | | |
| Eunjung | 24/F | Highschool (Seoul) | Main (CH 5) Hope Hall |
| Amin | 22/F | Highschool (Incheon) | Main (CH 5/ CH 8) Hope Hall |
| Eunmi | 21/F | Highschool (Seoul) | Main (CH 5) Hope Hall |
| Yurim | 25/F | Art college (Seoul) | Main (CH 6) Alba (Joowha's friend) |
| Joowha | 25/F | Beauty college (Seoul) | Main (CH 6) Alba (Yurim's friend) |
| Seul | 25/F | Art college (Ilsan) | Main (CH 6) Alba (Damin's friend) |
| Hyunmi | 26/F | University (Seoul) | Main (CH 7) Examinee |
| Insu | 26/F | University (Seoul) | Main (CH 7) Examinee (Rena's friend) |
| Jehee | 26/F | University (Sunnam) | Main (CH 7) Trainee (Japanese subtitler) |
| Woo | 29/F | University (Seoul) | Main (CH 7) Examinee (Jungsu's friend) |
| Minje | 32/F | Postgraduate (Seoul) | Main (CH 7) Examinee (Min's sister) |
| Reehee | 23/F | College drop (Incheon) | Main (CH 8) Candlelight protestor (BL) |
| Gong | 32/F | University (Seoul) | Main (CH 8) Candlelight protestor (BL) |
| Rinu | 19/F | High school student (Cheongju) | Main (CH 8) Candlelight protestor |
| Hyuna | 18/F | High school student (Seoul) | Main (CH 8) Candlelight protestor |
| SUB INFORMANTS (15 YOUNG WOMEN) | | | |
| Ahn | 23/F | High school (Seoul) | SUB (CH5) Baeksu Hall (online interview) |
| Miyoung | 35/F | High School (Seoul) | SUB (CH6) Albamon (online interview) |
| Unsil | 28/F | Post graduate (Seoul) | SUB (CH 6) Yurim's friend |
| Rena | 26/F | Doctoral student (Seoul) | SUB (CH 7) Insu's friend |
| Jungsu | 33/F | Doctoral student (Incheon) | SUB (CH 7) Woo's friend |
| Leesu | 18/F | High school student | SUB (CH 8) Leehe's younger sister |
| Taek | 28/F | University | SUB (CH 8) Media activist |
| Hatoru | 30/F | Unknown | SUB (CH 8) Candlelight protestor (BL) |
| Unjun | 33/F | Doctoral student | SUB, Divorced single mom |
| Taehui | 31/F | Doctoral student | SUB, Japanese drama fan |
| Yumi | 31/F | Postgraduate | SUB, Public relation agent (regular worker) |
| Yugang | 31/F | Postgraduate | SUB, Public servant (regular worker) |
| Hakje | 32/F | University | SUB, Contracted design modifier |
| Min | 34/F | University | SUB (CH 7) Minje's sister (regular worker) |
| Damin | 23/F | Art university student | SUB (CH 7) Seul's friend |
| SELECTED OTHER INTERVIEWEES | | | |
| Joo-joo | 38/M | University | SUB (CH 5) Baeksu Hall head |
| Monjo | 40/F | Postgraduate | SUB (CH 5) Hope Hall counsellor |
| Red | 37/M | High school | SUB (CH 5) Baeksu Hall operator |
| Sky | 25/M | High school | SUB (CH 5) Baeksu Hall sub-head |
| Seok | 31/M | Art university | SUB (CH 6) Seul's friend |
| Dojun | 45/M | Unknown | SUB (CH 6) Call centre manager |
| Taewon | 17/M | High school student | SUB (CH 8) Candlelight protestor |